

"The Second Coming of Christ" I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Introduction

This morning we come to an end to this fall series that we've called *Doctrines That Will Change Your Life*. We've studied:

- The Practical Value of Good Doctrine
- The Sovereignty of God
- The Sinfulness of Man
- Justification and Forgiveness
- Spiritual Adoption
- Worship
- Presbyterianism
- Infant Baptism
- The Grace found in the Lord's Supper

In all of these we have endeavored to look at the practical side of theology. What difference does it make what we believe. At the end of the day, our conclusion is that it makes an enormous difference. What you believe always works itself out in the way you live. In fact you can say you believe one thing, but ultimately your actions will reveal your deepest convictions. Difficult circumstances will test those convictions.

Today we properly conclude this series with the subject of the Second Coming of Christ. Eschatology, or the study of the last things, remains one of the most popular topics in evangelicalism. It is a huge subject with many sub-plots. We are

going to limit ourselves today to the matter of Christ physical return.

The promise of the 2nd coming of Christ brings great hope and comfort and direction to those who belong to Jesus. And while the details and timing of His return is the thing that fascinates so many people, those matters are not near as critical as the simple reality that He will return.

[I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11]

On one end of the scale you have those who believe Jesus will come any moment. They look for signs of the fulfillment of last day prophecies in every political movement, in every worldwide war and environmental catastrophe. On the other end, is a new theology that says when Christ returned in 70 A.D., not physically but spiritually, to judge Israel, that every promise of his return was thus fulfilled. They look for nothing else.

So before we get to the *so what* of the 2nd coming, let's review the basic facts about His return.

1. Jesus Christ was physically and bodily raised from the dead three days after His crucifixion; he ascended in that same body into heaven where He rules today at the right hand of the Father.

The whole gospel is built upon this truth. Paul taught that *if Christ has not been raised then your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins*. The central truth of Christianity is the atonement. Jesus willingly laid down His life, promised that He would rise again, and continually demonstrated that the plan of the redemption of the world was the focus of the whole Bible. Therefore the idea of the 2nd coming of Christ is not a second attempt because

the first one failed. It is part of the original master plan.

2. Jesus' return will be visible, physical and once and for all.

In other words, we are not looking for a symbolic return. As already mentioned the Bible does use that kind of language in some cases. When Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem, which is the content of most of Matthew 24, He said, *just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.* That is distinctive Old Testament language that is referring to Christ coming in judgment, but not coming physically. So why then do we insist that Jesus will return one time, physically?

Acts 1 is the key passage. At the ascension of Jesus, as the disciples watched Him depart into the clouds, the angels said, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”*

Certainly what we read here in I Thessalonians confirms that. *The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds' to meet the Lord in the air...* That is hardly the description of something symbolic. It describes a physical, not a metaphorical event. On a day that no one can know, Jesus is going to return to earth in His resurrected body.

3. His coming again will mark the consummation of all things.

Some claim he will return first to rapture out the believers and then again later to bring an end to things. The immensely popular *Left Behind* series promoted the idea that what we read in I Thessalonians 4 describes a rapturing of believers and the beginning of a 7 year tribulation. But Jesus promised to come once not twice. When He returns, three things will immediately happen.

- Satan will be cast into the lake of fire and receive his final judgment. All of his influence and opposition to God will come to a permanent end. (Rev. 20:10)
- Jesus Christ will sit on His judgment seat and all men will give an account to Him. He will separate the sheep from the goats. Men will either pay for their sins eternally in judgment in hell; or they will be pronounced innocent by virtue of the blood of Christ shed on their behalf. Every wrong will be made right. Absolute justice will be established. No sin will be unpunished. No righteous act unrewarded.
- There will be the establishment of a new heavens and a new earth. The pain and groaning of earth will cease. The pain and suffering of those saved by Christ will come to a joyful end. An eternal celebration will begin in the new heaven and earth. We will spend all of our time exploring the wonder of our newly resurrected bodies as we live in unhindered service and worship of Christ.

4. No one knows when He will come again. Dispensational premillennialists expect Jesus to return any day or year. Post-millennialists expect

hundreds or thousands of years before the requirements for His return are met. Jesus said *Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—* We would be foolish to ignore such clear words from Jesus.

So those are four basic facts about the 2nd coming. Certainly studying the future is fascinating stuff. Trying to understand the significance of current events with the Kingdom of God is worthy. Without jumping into the millennial debate today, what I do want to do is consider why it is important that we hold firmly to the teaching of Scripture that Jesus will one day return again. So here's the so *what* of the 2nd coming.

1. It keeps us from despair when we face the death of believing loved ones.

This is the point of I Thessalonians 4. Death is one of the most significant events in life. The severe sickness and nearness of death will bring everything else to a standstill in life. Just look at what the Lord brought to the Kesslers. Death came very near. Everything else faded into insignificance. And rightfully so. Death is not something we can undo.

And that is exactly why Paul wrote these words. Without the gospel, the one thing that is certain for us all, (that's death) would leave us with no hope and only despair. Our hope for the future, for those

whom we love, for those who by faith have believed in Christ – is found in the 2nd coming of Christ. It is at that point in history that the reality of our salvation will be made known to all the world. It is at that point that the completion of our salvation will come about. When Jesus Christ returns, Christians will receive their resurrected bodies and will stand victorious with Christ.

That reality, Paul says, is something that by faith, we need to look to and hold on to. If you have lost someone you love, and if that person knew Jesus Christ, then you have no reason to live without hope. And though you may rightly grieve your loss, and shed tears of sorrow and loneliness at their departure, you have a way to deal with your grief. Verse 18 says, *comfort one another with these words*. In other words, remembering and meditating on the promise of the return of Christ is a means God has provided for you to comfort your soul.

It also can stand as a motivation to share Christ with those who do not know Him . It's interesting to read Romans 9 and 10 where Paul anguishes and grieves over his lost brethren who are not Christians. But in the end, he finds that the reality of their being cut off from Christ motivates him to pray and to speak of the gospel. And it should be that way for you too.

2. It gives us a sense of accountability.

It's interesting that I Thessalonians 5 confirms that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. No one knows when. But it also makes it clear that there are two approaches to a thief in the night. You

can deny that such a thing could ever happen to you. Or you can be prepared. Those without Christ will *not escape* (vs.3). But others know that day will come. (Read I Thes. 5:4-6)

Honestly, too many Christians live like those who are in the world. Too many fit the description of those in verse 7. *Those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.* Too many live as though they will not be accountable to God; as though their sin makes no difference. But we are children of the day, children of light. Look at verse 8. *But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breast plate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.*

I'm wondering how you would evaluate your life right now. Are you alert or asleep? Are you living like a child of the day or a child of the night? The truth of the 2nd Coming is that you do not know when you will be asked to give an account to Christ. Whether by His return or by your unexpected death, that day could be tomorrow. Are you so caught up in your own desires and pleasures and pursuits that you have lost track of what is truly important? If so, then let today be the day that you turn back to Him.

3. It gives us the hope of victory over sin and perfection in glory with Christ.

What is your destiny? Who are you really? Verse 9 tells us. *For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.* By pointing us to the 2nd Coming, Paul is

reminding us who we are. The day will come when you will no longer struggle against your flesh. You will no longer fail and let people and God down. But the point of that is not that you quit battling and fighting for holiness now, but rather that you realize this is your calling. He saved you so that you would be like Him. So, as verse 11 say, you are to build up one another.

The promise of the 2nd coming of Christ is also a promise that you can live victoriously now. You have the right and the power for victory because you are connected by faith to Jesus.

Peter said it like this: *Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy.*

What does he say? *Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* You see, the same grace that you will receive then, is available to you now. Are you guarding yourself against all sin? Are you seeking after Jesus Christ?

The reality of Jesus' coming again can bring you comfort when you suffer. Give you accountability for what you do today knowing that tomorrow you may stand face to face with Christ. And give you the desire and confidence that you can have victory over sin today. Jesus *is* coming again.

