

We Believe: Christ's Return

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4.15–17; Titus 2.13

Theme: God's gospel will be brought to fulfillment by the Lord Himself at the end of this age.

Introduction — The sands of time are sinking

The dawn of Heaven breaks,
The summer morn I've sighed for,
The fair sweet morn awakes—
Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
But dayspring is at hand, —
And glory, glory dwellers,
In Immanuel's land.

- a delightful hymn, *The Sands of Time Are Sinking*
- it lets us sing of our blessed hope: Christ's glorious return
- this is what we learn in our Free Church's Statement of Faith, Article #9
- would you read it with me?

EFCA Statement of Faith, Article #9:

We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

- going to simply highlight various phrases here
- and then let many Scriptures speak for themselves this morning

What we see in Scripture, and in our Statement of Faith is this:

I. HIS RETURN IS...

- certain! Sure, guaranteed, promised by God the Father Himself

1. Acts 1:9 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

1) Jesus prepared them

- Acts 1:3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

2) Yet they did not understand fully

- as we heard in the verses which follow this, they did not have full understanding...yet
- but one thing is clear: they did come to this and declared with clarity

2. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.
 - 1) a divine “will”
 - “The Lord Himself **WILL** descend...”
 - leaves no doubt
 - 2) apostles taught this certainty
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:7 and [God will] grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels

Because His return is certain...

II. HIS RETURN WILL BE...

- what they saw in Acts 1 is what they were promised & eagerly anticipated
 - and so our Statement of Faith puts it plainly in three points
1. **A personal return**
 - not something spiritual, mental, or emotional
 - Jesus Himself will come for us
 2. **A bodily return**
 - He will return as He left: with a glorified physical body
 - Acts 1:11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”
 - Philippians 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
 - 1 John 3:2 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.
 3. **A glorious return**
 - not hidden, not secret, not seen by only some, but by all, believer & unbeliever alike
 - Titus 2:13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
 - once clothed in humility
 - Revelation 19:16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.
 - transfiguration of Matthew 17:2 fulfilled
 - Matthew 17:2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.
 - see this come about in John’s glimpse of the glorified Jesus

- Revelation 1:13-16 and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

We wait with eager anticipation to see Him because...

III. HIS RETURN WILL REVEAL HIM AS...

1. King

- once a crucified Messiah; not the reigning and returning King, son of David
- 1 Corinthians 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,
- Luke 1:32-33 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
- Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

2. Judge

- John the Baptist preached this
- Matthew 3:10-12 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”
- look forward to glory, but not all should
- Isaiah 29:20 For the ruthless shall come to nothing
and the scoffer cease,
and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,
- Isaiah 35:4 Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”
- Isaiah 61:2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
- Paul preached this

- Acts 17:31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

- until that day, we wait this Blessed Hope

While we wait, we stand in faith that...

IV. HIS RETURN IS...

- not speculative
- yet, time is unknown to any human being

1. Known only to God

- Jesus taught us about what to look for
- Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21
- Matthew 24:42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
- Matthew 24:36 “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

2. Demanding constant expectancy

- Matthew 25:13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.
- Mark 13:33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.
- Luke 12:35, 40 “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning.... You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”
- live a godly life now while we wait
- 1 Thessalonians 5:6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.
- Romans 13:11-14 Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime.... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.
- 2 Peter 3:10-12 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

3. Our Blessed Hope

- earliest Christians filled with this expectancy
- Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,
- Titus 2:13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

• **1 John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.**

• do not let Jesus' very own words fill your heart with this?

• **Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!**

• we are bound to time on this earth, yet we are to wait with a look always to the sky

• **2 Peter 3:8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**

• does it seem like too long a delay? There is a purpose for His waiting

• perhaps you are not yet a Christian; then remember:

• **2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**

• until then, you & I are sustained by God & His promises

• **2 Peter 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.**

• we will receive all that God promises through His Holy Spirit...

• **...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:14)**

4. A motivation to godly living and mission

- sadly, there have been those who thought a variety of wrongful things about His return
- some once held that Christ had come and they had missed it
- Thessalonica had a group of these and Paul exhorted believers to deal firmly with them
- then there are those who somehow think that He will never return
- at least, not in their lifetime and they grow discouraged or complacent
- we've heard the admonitions to watchfulness, sober-minded living and more
- there are also those who just want to escape all the bad things of world
- second coming for them is more about getting out of here than seeing Jesus
- Jesus exhorted us to be good stewards—managers—of this life
- and when He returns, He will reward those who have been faithful
- C.S. Lewis:

Happy are those whom [the Lord] finds laboring in their vocation, whether we're merely going out to feed the pigs or laying good plans to deliver humanity a hundred years hence from some great evil. Perhaps the curtain will fall—those pigs will never in fact be fed, the great campaign against slavery or governmental tyranny will never in fact proceed to victory. No matter; you were at your post when the inspection came.

Conclusion – Must live to hear these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant"

- **Matthew 24:46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.**
- **Romans 13:12 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.**
- wait for day when He will come to restore all Scripture has foretold

- Acts 3:21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.
- so wait for Him
- Hebrews 9:28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.
- the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ—will be fulfilled at end of this age
- so, 1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.
- may our prayer always be *marana tha*—“Come, Lord!”