

Unit 2

THE GOD WHO MAKES ALL THINGS NEW

Epistles, Revelation

Memory Verses

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

—REVELATION 21:4-5

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The Church That Forgot Its Hope

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Christ will return to this earth and raise His people from the dead.

When we read stories of survival, we wonder and marvel at how the people survived. What was it that enabled them to endure when so many others would not have? Perhaps Admiral Stockdale answered this question best when he explained the key to his surviving an eight-year imprisonment in one of Vietnam's POW camps: the mixture of unwavering hope he would survive and the ability to confront the brutal facts of his situation.¹ Never losing hope is key to survival. Hope sustains life even in the most difficult of situations, while losing hope hastens death. That is the power of hope, or the lack of it.



How has hope sustained you through difficult situations, or what are you going through now that requires hope?

As we examine a few of the New Testament epistles before reaching the Book of Revelation, we will learn how we are to live today in light of our future. First up in this session from 1 Thessalonians, we will see the importance of living with Christian hope—a hope that looks forward to the resurrection, Christ's return, and the final judgment. When Jesus returns, He will raise His people from the dead and judge the wicked. This future gives us hope to endure whatever comes our way today and also the grounds to encourage one another for faithful living.

1. Christian hope looks forward to the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Paul said twice that what he shared in the previous twelve verses of this chapter was known by the Thessalonians (4:2,9). He wrote to remind them of what they already knew. But in verse 13, Paul shifts to share something the church may not have known—resurrection hope for the dead in Christ. For Paul, this was not merely a theological issue; it was intensely practical. The Thessalonians’ questions, concerns, and misunderstandings about what happens to dead believers would have ripple effects into how they lived, if it hadn’t already. If there is no hope in death for the believer, why does it matter how we live today? Why live holy and pure and sacrifice the pleasures of the world for no apparent benefit?

Many of us ask similar questions today. We might look at our culture and see unbelievers prospering and wonder if living for Christ is worth it. We don’t want to abandon Christ, but we wonder if we need to be extreme in how we live.

To answer these questions, Paul pushed the Thessalonians, and us, to look to the end of the story. Yes, living for Christ can be costly today. Yes, it can be difficult and even painful. But when we look to the end of the story—that all believers, living and dead, will be resurrected—we find motivation for living today. Christian hope provides the courage we need to live out our faith and empowers us to endure and persevere. As Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthian church, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:19). But our hope *is* for more than this present time. Our hope is in our King returning for us. We will make it!



Voices from Church History

“Let us, my brethren, with regard to those who have left us in the Lord, let us, with regard to ourselves and our own future, be ever looking for and hasting to that day of God; the day when that better thing which God hath provided for us shall be manifested, and they with us shall be complete, who without us were not perfect.”²

—Henry Alford (1810-1871)



How does hope in the resurrection address the difficulties you struggle with in living for Christ?

Admiral Stockdale was not the first to share the survival formula of hope mixed with reality—Paul beat him to it by nearly two millennia. While Paul called on the Thessalonians to find hope in the future resurrection of the dead, he didn't minimize the darkness of grief. The pain of losing a loved one, even a loved one in Christ, is real and should not be overlooked. The Christian should not look upon death with cold stoicism but should grieve death, reflecting the value of the gift God had given in that person's life. Not to grieve is not to care. To grieve is to feel the loss, even if temporary, and to yearn for the day when death will be no more and God will reunite all of His people to Himself and one another.

So Christians are to grieve; it is right and fitting that we do, but we do not grieve as the world grieves. We grieve differently, knowing death is not final. Believers grieve with hope that looks forward to the resurrection. It is hope in spite of the darkness.

Paul's support for such encouragement to the church rests in the resurrection of Jesus. The transition between verses 13 and 14 is the word "for," denoting purpose. What Paul states in verse 13 is true because of what he states in verse 14. We grieve with hope because we believe Jesus died and rose again. Christ's resurrection guarantees ours.



In what ways have you comforted others during loss, or been comforted yourself, that has been helpful?

2. Christian hope looks forward to Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Paul may have anticipated the Thessalonians responding to what he wrote in verses 13-14 with a question: “Well, that sounds great for those who are dead in Christ, but what about the living? What will happen to us if we are still alive when Jesus returns?” Earlier Paul was concerned about the Thessalonians not understanding what is in store for their dead loved ones; now he turns his attention to those who are still alive.

Paul makes it clear that believers who are alive when the Lord returns will not be denied anything experienced by those who are asleep. The dead in Christ will not enjoy an extended private reception with Jesus apart from believers who are alive. The dead will be raised first, but those who are alive “will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” And at that point, all believers—living and dead—will be where they belong, with Jesus.



What thoughts and emotions does Paul's teaching on both the dead and living in Christ being with Him at His return elicit in you?

While the truth of the dead and living in Christ being caught up with Him at His return is ample reason to hope, Paul adds two other details to increase our understanding and to heighten our anticipation of this event.



Voices from Church History

“I believe that in the end the truth will conquer.”³

—John Wycliffe
(circa 1320-1384)

First, he describes how the Lord will come with a shout, the archangel's voice, and the trumpet of God. This is similar to John's language used in the Book of Revelation, especially in chapter 10. While Christians hold different interpretations about how the last days will play out (see the 99 Essential Christian Doctrine "Millennial Views"), we all hold to the truth that one day Jesus will return in glory, bring an end to all that is opposed to Him, and reward His own. This will be a day of great victory for believers, a time of celebration! As we look toward that day, whether we are dead or alive when it occurs, we should be ready to endure pain and suffering, persevere through tribulation, and stand in the face of rejection since the second coming will reveal our conquering King.


Second, Paul clarifies that when Jesus returns, we will be raised with Him not just in that moment but forever. "We will always be with the Lord" in His presence from that day forward throughout eternity. We experience God's ongoing presence in our lives now, but on that day, we will experience Him in a fuller, more beautiful way.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

97. Millennial Views

There are three predominant views regarding how to understand the Bible's teaching on the millennial reign of Christ. The premillennial view holds that the millennium is a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth that will take place just after the return of Christ. The postmillennial view holds that the millennium happens during this church age, and the return of Christ will take place afterward. The amillennial view holds that there is no literal millennial reign of Christ here on earth, but instead, it symbolically represents Christ's reign in the hearts of God's people during the church age.

 How should Jesus' return deepen our love for Him and others?

 The return of Jesus will be good news for those who believe in Him but frightful news for unbelievers. How should Jesus' return impact our understanding and practice of evangelism?

3. Christian hope looks forward to final judgment (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

When Paul says that Jesus will return like a thief in the night, he is not impugning Jesus’ character. The comparison is not Jesus with a thief but Jesus’ return with a thief’s arrival. Both are unexpected and happen without warning. Just as we would not expect a thief to tell when he planned to rob a home, neither should we expect to know when Jesus will return. His return will be sudden, so sudden that the world will proclaim peace and security the instant before destruction comes.

For those of us in Christ, the message is that we need to “keep awake and be sober.” While our hope looks forward to Jesus’ return, it also serves as motivation to live faithfully today. We don’t want to be caught off guard when Christ returns and be discovered living foolishly. At the same time, we don’t want to fall asleep and fail to fulfill the mission He has given us—to share the gospel with the unbelieving world while there is still time for them to repent and experience God’s grace and mercy. Not knowing when Jesus will return doesn’t mean we cannot be ready; it should motivate us to live in a constant state of readiness.



What are some ways we can better steward the resources God has given us, such as time and possessions, in light of Christ's return?

The Day of the Lord will not just be a day of victory for God's people, but it will also be a sobering day of judgment for all those who reject Him (see Isa. 13:9-11; Zeph. 1:14-16). God, by His grace, provides rescue from judgment, but only to those who trust in Him.

While we should not delight in any person spending eternity outside of relationship with Christ, we can and should look forward to final judgment over Satan, sin, and death. When Jesus returns, all rebellion against Him will end. Sin and death will be no more. And Satan, the serpent of old, will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity. And on this day, everything that was once right will be made right once more for God's glory.

Presently the church is in a state of needing sanctification from her stains, wrinkles, and blemishes. However, when Christ returns, the church will be transformed into a state of glorification. John puts it this way: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). At the marriage supper of the Lamb, the church, the bride of Christ, will be dressed in white reflecting perfection. At this great coronation, the church will celebrate her husband, the Lord Jesus Christ who has perfected her.



Voices from Church History

"O miserable, unthankful, and most mischievous world! what shall be thy condemnation, when He that has so often gently provoked you to obey His truth, shall come in His glory, to punish thy contempt!... Our heavenly Father, of His infinite wisdom, to hold us in continual remembrance that in this wretched world there is no rest, suffereth us to be tried with this cross, that with an unfeigned heart we may desire not only an end of our own troubles (for that shall come to us by death), but also of all the troubles of the Church of God; which shall not be before the again-coming of the Lord Jesus"⁴

—John Knox (circa 1514-1572)



How does the coming judgment of Satan, sin, and death strengthen us to live faithfully for Christ today?



In what areas of your life is God sanctifying and purifying you as part of the bride of Christ?

Conclusion

Christian hope gives us a lens of faith through which we can better view and understand the world around us—a world plagued by sin, decay, death, and pain. With this lens, we look forward, beyond what we experience today, to a world unbelievers cannot see—a world transformed by Christ upon His return where He reigns in glory and He has made everything new. Seeing this in our future is what provides us with the encouragement we need to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). Christ is returning for us—whether we are dead or alive on that day—and He is judging the world as we know it. This is the hope we need.

But not forever. One day, we will cast aside this hope, not because it is unfilled but because it *has been* fulfilled. In the eternal state, we will no longer walk by hope because hope is only needed for that which is real but unseen (Rom. 8:24-25). One day we will no longer have to hope because what is presently unseen will be seen, when our Savior returns for us.

CHRIST CONNECTION: The Old Testament prophets continually spoke of the Day of the Lord—when God would return to judge the world and save His people. Paul spoke of a future Day of the Lord when Jesus would return, raise His people from the dead, and judge the wicked. Christians live in light of Christ’s second coming.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to encourage one another with words of hope.

1. How can we minister to unbelievers during loss without giving false hope or being insensitive?

2. What are some situations in which you can encourage other believers with words of hope?

3. What are some ways your group can help to prepare one another for the coming day of Christ's return?

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