

I THESSALONIANS 1:10
HOPE IN HIS RETURN!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. Over the last several weeks we have covered the first nine verses of I Thessalonians chapter 1. And I think I can safely say that it was not too controversial. It was pretty straight forward.

Paul spoke of their Labor of Love and how they served the Lord faithfully. He spoke of the Gospel Power in their lives and even though they were young Christians, their faith was seen by others. In other words, they were living what they said they believed.

And that same thought continued on as we saw their Godly Witness in Their Present Life and then where they came from, Their Past Life. God did a mighty work in their lives. And, even in the midst of persecution, they lived what they said they believed!

Now you knew it was bound to happen. I am going to deal with a controversial subject this morning. In fact, I am sure there will be several controversial passages in this letter. And here, well, it is a subject that has been looked down upon lately, seen as non-important. Which to me is really strange when so much of the Bible contains this subject. What is that topic that we will be looking at this morning here in I Thessalonians chapter 1?

The subject is the return of Jesus Christ! Let me show you what I mean about some today who are downplaying prophecy. First of all, Rick Warren tells us in his book, "The Purpose Driven Life",

“When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, ‘The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!’” (*PDL*, p. 285)

Now that may sound good, but it is not biblical. Think about it. Jesus held the Jews responsible for not knowing the day of His visitation the first time and the Lord has given to us what this world is going to be like when He returns, He wants us to know and He wants us to be watching!

Well, what is Rick Warren talking about then? He is quoting out of Acts 1:7 where we are told, “**And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.’**”

It sounds like Rick Warren is correct in what he is saying, right? Wrong! Context, context, context! When Rick Warren and others use this verse to justify their beliefs about not focusing on prophecy and the Lord’s return, they leave out an important point. What is that point?

Listen carefully. It is the question that the disciples of Jesus asked Him because the response of Jesus is born out of their question. Listen to what Acts 1:6 says, “**Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’**”

You see, they thought Jesus was going to establish the Kingdom now and Jesus is telling them that it is not time yet. He wanted to focus them on their upcoming role in spreading the Gospel. His very next comment in Acts 1:8, is a summary statement of the entire Book of Acts, and the work they would begin in building the Church.

We are still called to build the church, bring the Gospel message forward but we are not to negate the return of Jesus Christ or think we spend too much time on this glorious truth! It is our hope and thus, to ignore it you then take that hope away! I will talk more about that in a few minutes. First, let me share with you a few more who downplay this idea of prophecy and the Lord's return.

Tony Campolo says that Christians who "make a big thing of their claim that we are now living in the final stage of church history prior to the second coming of Christ" have been the cause of "extremely detrimental" consequences. They "discount the Sermon on the Mount," they don't care about the needy, and they have had such a negative "impact on geopolitics," which Campolo says "can lead only to war." Basically, according to Campolo they are the reason the world is in such a mess, and they are holding back progress of a more emerging spirituality.

(Faith Undone, p. 160, quoting Campolo, Speaking My Mind)

I think he is partially right. We are holding back the progress of a more emerging spirituality, a false spirituality, a false Jesus. That is what we are fighting against. And he says that because we are waiting for the Lord's return, looking forward to the Lord's return we are causing wars to break out! Are you kidding me? Folks, we are called to be salt and light and that is not bad for this world, it is good. Well, let me correct that. It is bad for this world's system but it truly is a blessing to the people whether they agree with it or not! We are a preserving force, or at least we should be!

Here is another one. This person wrote, “It is time that the church woke up to its true mission, which is to materialize the kingdom of God on earth, today, here and now . . . People are no longer interested in a possible heavenly state or a probable hell. They need to learn that the kingdom is here, and must express itself on earth . . . The way into that kingdom is the way that Christ trod. It involves the sacrifice of the personal self for the good of the world, and the service of humanity . . .”

Doesn't that sound wonderful? I hope not because the person who wrote that is the occultist, Alice Bailey! But interestingly enough, Christians are echoing those words today and they are not from the Bible!

Now think about this. Is our hope in this world? No, it is not! What about our hope being in the leaders of this world? No, it is not! What about our hope being in our jobs, our financial earnings, our health, our this or our that? No, it is not!

Then what should our hope be in? It is as Paul said in Titus 2:13, “**looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.**” Our hope is in the Lord and His return!

In saying that many would argue that if you go down that path, if you believe that and are teaching that, then people will just sit around and wait for the Lord's return. They will not be serving the Lord but waiting for the Lord! That is absolutely wrong!

Let me illustrate it like this. Say that my wife has gone away for a few weeks and it is getting close for her to return. In knowing that, in reading her letters and receiving her calls I know that the date of her return is getting closer. Now, does that cause me to sit in a lazy-boy chair and just wait for her to come home? Absolutely not!

Do you know what it does? It causes me to be excited and I am cleaning the house, preparing for her to come home. I want the house to be in order when she gets home!

What in the world does that have to do with what we have been talking about? I think John makes it very clear in I John 2:28 through 3:3 where we are told, “**And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**”

Notice, we are to abide in Him, follow Him and when He returns we will not be ashamed because we will not be doing the things that would make us ashamed when He comes. And knowing He is coming helps to keep us pure, it helps us to walk accordingly because we do not want to be doing things that would embarrass us when He comes, we are involved in things that would bring joy to His heart.

And like I have said, we continue serving the Lord until He comes, we don't stop. Or as Jesus said Luke 19:13, “**. . . Occupy till I come.**” (KJV) Continue doing the work that He has called us to do until He comes!

Now one more point before we get to our verse we will be looking at this morning. Keep in mind that as young as this church was, they knew about how to live and they knew of eschatology or end times, the return of the Lord and they were waiting for Him! And as you read through this letter, you will find that every chapter ends with a reference to the Lord's return. Let me show you what I mean.

In *I Thessalonians 1:10* we see that they are waiting for His return to be delivered from the wrath of God that is coming. His Imminent return!

In *I Thessalonians 2:19* we see the unity of all believers at His coming.

In *I Thessalonians 3:13* we see Paul speak of the sanctification process as they were being prepared for His return.

In *I Thessalonians 4:13-18* we see the focus on the Rapture of the church. Again, a very controversial subject today. And the reason the Rapture is so controversial is because people like to hold onto tradition, they listen to what others are saying, instead of just reading God's Word, taking it literally where it speaks literally and then believing what God is saying. And we will deal a lot more with this controversial subject when we get to I Thessalonians chapter 4.

And lastly, in *I Thessalonians 5:23* we see that they are prepared for His return.

Every chapter of this letter to the Thessalonians deals with the Lord's return and it was important to them and it should be to us. Roger Oakland said this in regards to the lackadaisical attitude of Christians today in regards to the Lord's return.

“Many who were once looking for the return of Jesus have fallen asleep. We now live in a period of time where numerous prominent Christian leaders are telling the Christian masses that paying attention to the signs of our times in light of the Bible is a waste of time. And many of them take it a step further and accuse those who believe what Bible prophecy says about the end of the age of being negative and self-centered.” (Roger Oakland)

Let me say this. It is not a waste of time. Not at all! God has told us these things to encourage us and to be a witness to others about what is happening. In Isaiah 44:6-8 we are told, **“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.’”**

Notice how important prophecy is to us. The Lord tells us what is going to happen so we don’t have to be afraid, we don’t have to be fearful, so that we won’t lose hope. But not only that. It is prophecy that we can use to speak of the Lord to others, to show them that what God has spoken about these last days is coming to pass! Is prophecy important? Of course it is!

It is as Spurgeon said, “Oh! This is a high mark of grace, when the Christian expects his Lord to come, and lives like one that expects him every moment. If you and I knew to-night that the Lord would come before this service was over, in what state of heart should we sit in these pews? In the state of heart we ought to be.” May we be ready for His return, it is getting closer every day!

This morning, as you can tell, we will be looking at our Hope in His Return! And in doing that we will be looking at this idea of the Imminent return of Jesus Christ or that it can happen at any moment. With that as our background, let's look at I Thessalonians 1:10 and see what the Lord has for us this morning as we study through His Word!

I THESSALONIANS 1

VERSE 10

Who are these young Thessalonian Christians waiting for? The return of Jesus Christ. And where will He be coming from? They knew He was coming from heaven to receive them and Paul will go into more details regarding that in I Thessalonians chapter 4.

But listen to what we are told in Acts 1:9-11 as Jesus is taken up into heaven, **“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”**

In other words, He is coming from heaven to earth and prior to Him establishing His Kingdom He will take His Bride, the Church home, we will meet Him in the air. Not only that, but once we are removed then the Lord will pour out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, we call this the Tribulation Period! Also, during that time we will see many Jews come to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, as well as Gentiles.

And as the Tribulation Period draws to the end, the Lord will return with His Bride, the Church, to establish His Kingdom on this earth where He will rule and reign for 1,000 years!

And what is Jesus going to deliver them and us from? He will deliver them and us **“from the wrath to come.”** What is that speaking of? It could be speaking of the Tribulation Period and I believe that is exactly what it is speaking of. Paul said in I Thessalonians 5:9-11, **“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”**

Keep in mind that back in I Thessalonians chapter 4 Paul spoke of the Rapture of the church and then in I Thessalonians chapter 5 he is speaking of the Day of the Lord or the Tribulation Period. Thus, in these verses we read that the **“wrath”** that Paul is speaking of is the wrath of God poured out during that seven-year Tribulation Period.

And thus, we will not be part of that period of time, the Tribulation Period because we will be raptured unto the Lord prior to the start and because of that they were to comfort one another with these words.

You see, as tough as things are, as persecution comes upon us, hang in there because this is from Satan and God will see you through. The wrath spoken of during the Tribulation Period is from God and God is not going to pour out His wrath upon us. Why?

There are several reasons but the main one is that the wrath of God has already been poured out upon Jesus for us as He bore our sins on the cross of Calvary. Thus, to pour out His wrath upon us now would cause us to be punished twice and God won't do that. He accepted the sacrifice that Christ had made and the payment is in full.

But for those who have rejected Christ, they will see His wrath, either during the Tribulation Period if they are around at that time or in Hell waiting for the final judgment, the Great White Throne Judgment where the unsaved will be cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity!

What I would like to focus on with the remainder of our time this morning is the imminency of the Rapture of the church or that it can happen at any moment. One writer put it like this in regards to this word, "*imminency.*" He wrote,

The primary thought expressed by *imminency* is that something important is likely to happen, and could do so without delay. While it may not be immediate nor necessarily soon, it is next on the program and may take place at any time. If the event is evil or potentially dangerous we would call it *impending* for it is threatening to occur. But if it is an event full of hope and joyful expectation we express it by the noun *imminence* or the adjective *imminent*. Among believers, these words normally relate to the possible soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to catch up His Church in that happy and monumental event called the Rapture.

- <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/doctrine-of-imminency-is-it-biblical>

I do realize that there are those who try to deny the imminency of the Rapture of the Church. One web page, which denies the imminency and the Rapture of the Church, went as far as saying this regarding the Rapture and the imminent return of Christ. We are told that,

Rapture doctrine did not exist before John Darby invented it in 1830 AD. Before it "popped into John Darby's head" no one had ever heard of a secret rapture doctrine. . . .

The fact that John Nelson Darby invented the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine around 1830 AD is unquestionably true. All attempts to find evidence of this wild doctrine before 1830 have failed, with a single exception: Morgan Edwards wrote a short essay as a college paper for Bristol Baptist College in Bristol England in 1744 where he confused the second coming with the first resurrection of Revelation 20 and described a “pre-tribulation” rapture. However Edwards ideas, which he admitted were brand new and never before taught, had no influence in the modern population of the false doctrine. That prize to goes to Darby. . . .

Prior to 1830, no church taught it in their creed, catechism or statement of faith.

- <http://www.bible.ca/rapture-origin-john-nelson-darby-1830ad.htm>

Now those are pretty bold statements made, and if true, then I would agree, the doctrine of the Rapture of the Church and the imminent return of Christ is wrong. Is there any evidence to disprove what this web page is saying? There are a couple of things we need to look at.

First of all we need to look at the idea that this was never taught before 1830 A. D. That is totally false. Let me show you what I mean in regards to the early church fathers teaching the doctrine of the Rapture and the imminent return of Christ.

Let me share with you this document from Pseudo-Ephraem that was written somewhere between 374 and 627 A. D. This is what was written,

“All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins”

I think that was a few years before Darby and 1830 A. D., don't you? Of course it is. And as you read this you can see what was written. The early church was looking for the return of Christ, it was imminent, and the church was to be removed, the Rapture, before the Tribulation Period started.

And let me make this clear. We all have ideas, traditions that we hold onto. But let me also say this. If your doctrine or tradition is not Scriptural, then you need to let it go. We will talk more about that in a few minutes but what I want to do right now is look at the early church writings and what the people believed in regards to the imminent return of Christ and the Rapture of the church.

Next, there is *The First Epistle of Clement, 23* (written around 96 A.D. by Clement, a prominent leader of the church at Rome who knew some of the apostles personally and probably is the Clement referred to in Phil. 4:3): “Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, ‘speedily will He come, and will not tarry.’”

That is speaking of the imminent return of Christ. Before 100 A. D. This was something that the early church believed! We are talking about some 1730 years before Darby! Again, look at the evidence and not tradition or the things that you have been taught regarding imminency!

We also see that as early as 70 – 180 A. D., *The Didache*, chapter 16, section 1, says, “Be vigilant over your life; let your lamps not be extinguished, or your loins ungirded, but be prepared, for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come.”

In other words, be ready because the Lord is coming. It is speaking of His imminent return!

Lastly, Tertullian wrote in 155 – 245 A. D., “But what a spectacle is that fast - approaching advent of our Lord, now owned by all, now highly exalted, now a triumphant One!”

Again, he is speaking of the imminent return of Christ. To say that the Rapture and the imminent return of Christ was not spoken of until the 1830’s by Darby is false!

Now, before you get too excited about that, let me put this disclaimer out there, and it is important for us to understand this. Just because the early church believed something, did something, taught something, does not mean it is biblical!

Let me say that again, because for some of you, that is a hard one to swallow. Just because the early church believed something, did something, taught something, does not mean it is biblical!

Let me give you an example because ancient practices are being brought into the church and they are not biblical, not at all. Some of you have heard of contemplative prayer and the desert fathers and the practices of these desert fathers have been brought into the church, like contemplative prayer. Ray Yungen tells us,

“One meditation scholar made this connection when he said: ‘The meditation practices and rules for living of these earliest Christian monks bear strong similarity to those of their Hindu and Buddhist renunciate brethren several kingdoms to the East . . . the meditative techniques they adopted for finding their God suggest either a borrowing from the East or a spontaneous rediscovery.’” From *A Time of Departing*, p. 42, 2nd ed. (Ray Yungen)

And Roger Oakland gives us more insight into this contemplative prayer and the desert fathers as he wrote,

What is contemplative prayer? Here is how one promoter defined it:

Contemplative prayer in its simplest form, is prayer in which you still your thoughts . . .

This puts you in a better state to be aware of God's presence, and it makes you better able to hear God's voice correcting, guiding and directing you.

If that definition sounds beneficial to one's spiritual well-being consider another explanation that provides an even clearer understanding:

Its practitioners are trained to focus on an inner symbol that quiets the mind . . . When practitioners become skilled at this method of meditation, they undergo a deep trance state similar to auto-hypnosis.

Contemplative prayer is making a big comeback. First discovered by monks in the 3rd century who isolated themselves in desert monasteries, you can now find practitioners and promoters in many evangelical churches today.

Brian Flynn, in his book *Running With the Wind*, provides interesting background to where the technique came from and how widely it is being accepted today. Quoting from his book:

Perhaps the Desert Fathers either came into contact with someone from the East who shared these practices with them, or maybe they stumbled across it themselves. Whatever its origin, this heretical practice (contemplative prayer) has entered our churches virtually unopposed.

The first form of monasticism was practiced by the *hermit*. (In Greek the word means desert). The first hermit was St. Anthony, a revered Egyptian monk who moved away from society and into the desert around 270 AD (3rd century). Many followed St. Anthony's lifestyle and also became hermits. Nearly 80 years later the first monastery was built. This brought the hermits together under one roof rather than each of them living alone in the desert.

. . . Thomas Merton is considered to be one of the founding fathers of contemplative prayer. His writings and ideas have impacted many today who are advocating that Christianity embrace prayer techniques borrowed from Eastern religion.

Consider the following statement that reflects Merton's Buddhist and Hindu beliefs:

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, . . . now I realize what we all are . . . if only they (people) could all see themselves as they really are . . . I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other . . . At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and illusions, a point of pure truth . . . this little point . . . is the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody.

Obviously, such a statement needs little commentary. Anyone who has even a shallow understanding of the Bible knows where this concept comes from. It is the same lie that Satan used to seduce Eve. Anyone who believes that man can be a god has been duped by the god of this world (Genesis 3: 15).

Richard Foster is one of Thomas Merton's disciples. He would be regarded as the most influential and well-known of those considered to be evangelical Christian and supportive of contemplative prayer. Foster considers Merton as his mentor.

Now consider this question: Why would someone who claims to be a Christian, after reading and understanding Merton's position on Eastern religion, promote his ideas? Worse yet, why is it that when other Christians who have embraced contemplative prayer are informed about this connection to Eastern religion, they refuse to listen?

Now, please pay attention to what Richard Foster said about his mentor, Thomas Merton: Thomas Merton has perhaps done more than any other twentieth-century figure to make the life of prayer widely known and understood . . . His interest in contemplation led him to investigate prayer forms in Eastern religion. Zen masters from Asia regarded him as the preeminent authority on their kind of prayer in the United States.

- <http://www.understandthetimes.org/commentary/c33.shtml>

What is my point about all of this? Very simply, the practices of the desert fathers, as unbiblical as they were, have been adopted into the church today and seen as a positive way to get closer to God. And look at all the people who are reading their books and following their practices. This is not at all a way to get closer to God and thus, just because the early church practiced it does not mean it is of God!

Let me share this with you to show you how bizarre things are getting in the Christian church today. And please keep in mind that this event took place some 37 years ago, and when you take that into consideration, we have come a long way from there and not in a good way! We are told,

The year was 1980. The man had oversight of more than 400 churches in his denomination. He had called and invited me to come to his office to get acquainted. When I entered, he asked me to sit down, and then said something peculiar: “Excuse me while I find a witness.”

He returned a few minutes later with a secretary. He told her to have a seat and to start taking notes. I asked him why he needed a witness. “Because I’m going to read you the riot act,” he responded. He then proceeded to do just that: “I want you to get out of my churches and stay out of them!”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because I don’t want any of my people hearing your message.”

“But my message is right out of the Bible,” I protested. “All I’m doing is preaching the soon return of Jesus.”

“I know,” he said, “and that’s the message I don’t want my people to hear.”

I was dumbfounded. “Don’t you believe in the second coming?”

“Not what you call the second coming,” he replied. “I believe the second coming occurs when a person accepts Jesus. He becomes alive in that person’s heart. That’s all there is to the second coming.”

Before I could reply, he added, “And there’s another reason I don’t want you preaching to my people. You are a salvationist!”

I had been called many names in my life, but never that one. “What do you mean by that?” I asked.

“You are one of those guys who believes a fellow can hear a sermon and come under conviction about sin, and that conviction will ultimately lead him to repent and experience what you call being born again.”

“I plead guilty,” I replied. “What are you?”

“Well, I’m not a salvationist!” he snapped. “I believe that any person in the world who is growing more mature is in the process of being saved.”

“Does that apply to Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“Whether they ever accept Jesus or not?”

“That’s right.”

One of the most curious things about this whole experience is that on the wall behind this man’s desk was a framed quotation that read, “I speak where the Bible speaks, and I am silent where the Bible is silent.”

Welcome to the bizarre world of Christian apostasy. And keep in mind that this happened in 1980. In the [37] years since that time, apostasy in the church has increased exponentially.

- The Popular Handbook on the Rapture, pp. 175-176, chapter 14 – David Reagan

Do you see the danger of following a man instead of following the Lord and His Word? I hope so! And I want you to understand that false doctrine was part of the early church. Look at some of the letters that Paul wrote and John and you will see them confronting false teachers and false doctrine. Even Jude had to confront this!

Also, when you read the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor that Jesus wrote to in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 you see four out of the seven having major doctrinal issues going on. That is in less than 70 years of the church being in existence! Then what are we to do?

You bring everything in light of the Scriptures to see if it is true or not. And yes, people may get offended by that but what are they afraid of? What are they trying to hide? I encourage you to check what I say with the Word of God. It is important for you and it keeps me accountable.

So let's look at some Scripture, not early church teaching, but the Word of God that will show us that the imminent return of Christ was taught. It was something that the early church was doing, waiting for the Lord's return, and it should be something that we are doing.

First of all, in I Corinthians 1:7 Paul tells us, “**... eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” The idea here is that they were working, serving the Lord and as they were they were waiting for His return, expecting it at any time and so should we!

We are told in I Corinthians 16:22, “**... O Lord, come!**” It is the Aramaic word, Maranatha. In regards to this word and how the early church used it, we are told,

The early church faced much persecution, and life for a Christian under Roman rule was not easy. The Romans required everyone to declare that Caesar was god. The early Christians knew that there is only one God and one Lord—Jesus Christ—and in all good conscience they could not call Caesar “Lord,” so the Romans looked upon them as traitors, persecuted them, and put them to death.

Living under those adverse conditions, the believers’ morale was lifted by the hope of the coming of the Lord. “Maranatha!” became the common greeting of the oppressed believers, replacing the Jewish greeting shalom (“peace”). The followers of Jesus knew there would be no peace because Jesus had told them so (Matthew 10:34; Luke 12:51). But they also knew the Lord would be returning to set up His kingdom, and from that truth they drew great comfort. They were constantly reminding and being reminded that the Lord is coming (Luke 21:28; Revelation 22:12). Jesus taught several parables on this same theme of watching and waiting and being prepared for His return (Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 12:35-40).

Today, believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ live our lives in the light of the knowledge that He can come at any time. We are to be ready when the call comes. Every day we should expect Him to come, and every day we should long for Him to come. Maranatha reminds us to keep our eyes on the eternal things of the Spirit. To dwell on material things is to be in constant mental turmoil. Looking down, we see the earth; looking around, we see earthly things. But looking up, we see the hope of the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. To those who are discouraged today, Maranatha! To those who are worried today, Maranatha! To those who are filled with anxiety over the problems they are facing, Maranatha! Our Lord is coming!

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/maranatha.html>

What a great greeting that is, Maranatha. Again, they were waiting for the imminent return of Christ!

Again we see Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20-21, **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”**

Paul was telling the Philippian believers to not lose sight, the Lord is coming back. They were to eagerly wait for Him and so should we!

In I Thessalonians 4:15-18 Paul wrote, **“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”**

Paul is encouraging them that those who have died in Christ did not miss out on the Rapture. They will be raised first as the Lord calls us all home and we too will be caught up or snatched quickly to meet the Lord in the air. In the Second Coming we come with Jesus to establish the Kingdom Age! So they were eagerly waiting for His return and they were to comfort each other with these glorious words, He is coming back!

In Titus 2:13, a verse we have read already, Paul said, **“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

Notice who we are waiting for? Not for the Antichrist or some sign, but we are waiting for Jesus. He is our hope; His appearing is what we are looking for. Don't lose sight of that.

Don't be distracted!

In James 5:7-9 we are told, **“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”**

James is telling us that the Lord is coming and we need to be patient, not lose hope. It is getting close, in fact, the Judge is standing at the door! The imminent return of Jesus!

I like the way that Zane Hodges illustrates this scene for us. He wrote,

The readers are thereby likened to a group of litigants, or defendants, standing within a courtroom. Total silence is required out of respect for the judge who is just outside the courtroom door and about to step inside and take his place on the judgment seat. Like a Roman lector announcing a judge’s impending entry, as it were, James cries, “Quiet!” His Christian readers must fully silence their complaints against one another in the realization that their Lord and Judge can at any moment appear and sit down on the Bema (Judgment Seat) in order to assess their lives (cf. 2:12-13; see also 2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10-12)

- Zane Hodges, The Epistle of James, p. 111

And there are many more but I love what we are told in Revelation chapter 22, verse 17,

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let

him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” First of all,

there is the invitation from Almighty God to come to Him and receive the free gift of life that is found in Jesus.

Let the Spirit of God soften your heart so that you may receive the Savior into your life.

And when you do, like all believers should be doing, and Revelation 22:20 tells us, **“He who**

testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord

Jesus!” In other words, ***MARANATHA!***

As we have seen, as you read through those passages of Scripture they indicate to us that Christ may come at any moment, His return is Imminent! Dr. Walvoord declares, “The exhortation to look for ‘the glorious appearing’ of Christ to His own (Titus 2:13) loses its significance if the Tribulation must intervene first. Believers in that case should look for signs.”

He is exactly right. I don’t know about you, but I am looking for Jesus Christ! And I do realize that maybe you are not that interested in the Lord’s return. Maybe you are going through some very difficult times right now and you can’t think about anything else.

So too was the early church and this young church, and the focus from them was the return of Jesus. He is our blessed hope! His appearing in the heavens for us, meeting us in the air is what we pray for. And as much as there is such confusion and exclusion for the return of Jesus, it is an important part of the Scriptures.

And for me, why do I want to take your hope away by not teaching this truth? I don't and I won't, so as we go through these passages of Scripture I will cover them, we will look at them. And keep in mind that the book of Revelation is the unveiling of Jesus in all of His glory as He returns to set up His Kingdom on earth! So yes, we will even cover the book of Revelation!

As I close let me leave you with these words. We are told,

Living the Christian life can be likened to driving a car. As we drive on the highway, we keep two viewpoints in balance: Looking ahead at the upcoming road, and looking behind through the rearview mirror. As we move toward heaven, we also need to maintain a balance between two biblical viewpoints: looking for the blessed return of Christ that will bring eternal glorification and reward, and looking back to the atoning death of Jesus that provided everything we have received in redemption, are experiencing in sanctification, and will receive in the inheritance reserved for us in heaven (1 Peter 1:4).

The Bible provides many motivations for us to grow in Christ and persevere in our spiritual walk. Many of them are directly connected to the imminent return of Christ for the church. In Titus 2:12, Paul said the grace of God teaches us to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” as we look for the “blessed hope” of the return of Christ (verse 13).

In I John 2:28, John urged us to abide in Christ, living expectant lives of fellowship and obedience, so that when Christ returns we will have confidence and not want to shrink away in shame.

In I Thessalonians 5:23, Paul asked God Himself to sanctify us (a progressive “setting apart” by the Holy Spirit) and preserve our soul, spirit, and body “blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The biblical passages that promise the rapture of the church teach imminence as an event that can occur at any moment. In these passages, there are no events or signs that must precede the rapture. They either encourage believers to continue to look forward to the hope that awaits them, or they motivate believers to pursue holiness in anticipation of seeing Christ soon. And until the rapture, believers are “to look, not for some sign,” but for the Lord Himself.

- The Popular Handbook on the Rapture, p. 90, chapter 6 – Wayne A. Brindle

What is your hope for the future? I pray it is the Lord and His return! As Paul said to these young believers who turned from idols and to the Lord, **“and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”** I Thessalonians 1:10. May we keep our eyes focused upon His return – *MARANATHA!*