
The Marks of an Expectant Church

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

When is Jesus coming? I don't know. No one knows. But I do know this, He is coming. Not everyone knows this!

Illustrate with Aechompong's response upon hearing, for the first time, of the coming of Jesus again.

We have a Greek word that is often used when the coming of Jesus is referred to. It is the word *Parousia*. It means, "the arrival and appearing..." It invokes both delight and dread as we will see. The coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians is a delight to the Christian as it relates to our salvation (1:9-10), service (2:19-20), stability (3:11-13) and sorrow (4:13-18).

The coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians:

As evidence of our salvation by the Lord (1:9-10)

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Because of our service for the Lord (2:19-20)

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

For our standing before the Lord (3:11-13)

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

In our sorrow over those dying in the Lord (4:13-18)

Well, they had a big question. Since the Lord is coming, then what about those who have died? To us this might seem like a question a Christian would never ask. But imagine if we did not have this text. This paragraph is the clearest teaching on what will actually happen when Christ comes.

The *Parousia* and Those Who Have Died**(4:13-18)**

Since the Lord's coming, then what about those who have died? To us this might seem like a question a Christian would never ask. But imagine if we did not have this text. This paragraph is the clearest teaching on what will actually happen when Christ comes.

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. 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.

What They Did Not Know**(v.13)****The Problem of Ignorance**

We must value being informed Christians about truth. There is absolutely no virtue in spiritual ignorance. And there is great danger in it.

The Perplexity of the Saints

For these saints, their ignorance of the details surrounding the return of Christ left them grieving like the world. The unbeliever has no hope beyond eternity. We grieve, upon the passing of Christians, in the glorious hope of seeing them once again.

The Details of His Coming**(v.14-17)****Basis - The Resurrection of Christ****(v.14)**

The return of Christ is constantly connected with His resurrection and ascension. The resurrection is the beginning of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom. The force of the sentence is simply this, "You believe that Christ was raised, then there will be a return and resurrection for those who have died in Christ."

Description - The Return of Christ**(v.15-17)**

When Christ returns:

He will descend from heaven.

Acts 1:9-11 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."

Matthew 24:26-27 So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

He will be accompanied by a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet.

Matthew 24:29–31 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The dead in Christ will be raised first. And those who are alive will be caught up so that together we will meet Christ in the air.

1 Corinthians 15:35–57 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This reunion with Christ and the church will be eternally unbroken.

Matthew 25:31–34 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

These are the facts of this passage connected with what Jesus taught according to Matthew. There is a clear consistency across the texts. What a glorious day it will be when Jesus our

dear Lord from heaven comes, lifts all, dead and alive alike, out of their mortality and grants them their glorious body. Then the kingdom will be brought to fullness and we will rule and reign with Him forever.

What We Must Do

(v.18)

“Comfort one another with these words.” Notice how Paul uses these doctrinal truths. This leads me to the following observations.

Our primary need in emotional distress? Truth. Teaching. Doctrine is what meets our needs, feeds our souls, renews our minds, builds up our faith, comforts us in sorrow, encourages us in discouragement.

Our responsibility is to use the truth with one another. We are not just there to listen, not just there to “feel with you”. We are to be for one another with *truth*.

It is *these words* which encourage us.

The Parousia and Those Who Are Living

(5:1-11)

Since the Lord is coming, then how are we to live?

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.

What They Knew

(v.1-2)

When it came to what was to be revealed about schema, they well knew. That knowledge is available in the Old Testament and in the teaching of Christ. This phrase “times and epochs” is used to refer to the redemptive history matrix of God’s outworking His redemption in personal and in covenant terms. The “Day of the Lord” is the day (or possibly, the period of time) which includes all the events of the Second Coming. He did not need to write to them to clarify this further.

Jesus has taught us that His coming would be like that of a thief in the night. The lesson is that we are not to be caught unawares.

The Difference It Makes

(v.3-8)

That there will be both believers and unbelievers alive at the return of Christ makes a huge difference.

Unbelievers - They will think that they are secure and safe. No one is out there. Everything is OK. They can sleep. All is well. At that moment, the wrath of God falls on them as He comes and there will be no escape. The central part of the Book of Revelation describes the horrendous judgments which make up these simple words.

Believers - We are not in the darkness. We are neither in their ignorance nor in their sinful condition. We know that He is coming. The timeline of history has an endpoint. Since this is so, then we ought to be living differently.

That Jesus is coming and coming soon means that we had better get serious about our Christian lives. As soldiers of Christ, we need to be self-controlled. We ought to be equipping ourselves. See, here is the picture of a waiting warrior: his helmet of salvation gives him hope and his breastplate of faith and love protect his heart.

The Reason It's True

(v.9-10)

The believer is not destined to experience the wrath of God. Our salvation rescues us from His wrath. That salvation means that whether we have died or are alive at Jesus' return, we will live together with Him.

The wrath referred to here is the wrath to come from which we are delivered (1:10), which will be their experience forever (2:16), that will be poured out on unbelievers (5:3) and to which we are not destined (5:9).

Why is there hope at Christ's coming? Why are we to be serious and self-controlled until Christ's coming? Because the Coming of Christ brings wrath on the lost; but, it brings glory to the saints.

What We Must Do

(v.11)

Two major responsibilities emerge from this truth.

Encourage - We must lift up one another's spirits and affections so that we can go one until the day of the Lord comes with all its attendant glory.

Edify - These truths must be used to build up spiritual strength and stamina.

It is distressing when the truths of the Lord's Coming become mere data for us to plug into the proper slot on our diagrams. Rather, it must become a living and quickening truth whose reality causes us to go hard after God with all our minds, all our hearts and all our wills knowing that the pursuit is going to end in a soul enrapturing consummation.

Reflect and Respond

I want to announce to you, in such a way that it will ring like a clear bell in your consciousness. Jesus is coming again. What a day that will be!

In the light of this, Christians grieve differently. Christians live differently.

Use truth in the mind to guide the affections in the heart. Informing our minds of spiritual realities will shape our affections (emotions, for the moderns) to be conformed by the Word and pleasing unto God.

Do not sleep in your sins. Just when you think that you are safe and secure and maybe even saved, the awful torrent of God's wrath will sweep over the world, over sinners dooming and damning them to their just torment. So flee to the safety of the cross. Do it today. Do not harden your heart. Do not satisfy yourself with false assurances. Seek God. Plead His mercy while you may. They day is well coming, when you will face the Judge of all the Universe. And there will be no escape.