*Session 7*

***The King Returns***

Introducing the Study

The Jerusalem Council was about more than settling a dispute over new believers. The very heart of the gospel was at stake: What was required for someone to be a true believer in Jesus Christ? Based on their knowledge of Scripture and the evidence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Gentiles, they concluded that faith alone in Christ alone was the core of the gospel message—and the gospel went forth to the nations unhindered.

**Why do you think there is a tendency within us to add additional requirements to the gospel?**

The expansion of the church was not without its challenges. At every turn, there was hostility and opposition to the gospel, and the believers often faced persecution. Still, the gospel spread as believers obeyed Jesus’ Great Commission. Today, we continue in this mission. We continue living and proclaiming the truth of the gospel with hope, with confidence, that someday, perhaps today, Jesus will return. And we know that when He does, He will make all things new and we will live in an unhindered relationship with God forevermore.

**How often do you think about the return of Christ? Why?**

Setting the Context

In many ways, the Book of Acts reads like the commission from Jesus in Acts 1:8. The church started in Jerusalem, expanded to Judea, then crossed cultural boundaries into Samaria and eventually into the rest of the world. This spread of the gospel centered in large part on the missionary efforts of the apostle Paul as he traveled and planted churches in many cities, such as Ephesus, Philippi, and Corinth. Much of the remainder of the New Testament includes the letters of Paul, Peter, and others to the young churches and Christians across the land. These letters clarified points of doctrine and addressed specific problems that had arisen in their congregations and lives.

**Why is it that we can learn and grow from reading letters in the Bible written to churches and individuals?**

The apostle John became a great apologist for the church, writing and preaching about the identity of Jesus, for which he was persecuted. As an old man he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he received the vision we know as the Book of Revelation. God showed John a heavenly perspective on how God’s story of redemption on earth would eventually come to an end with the return of Jesus Christ as the King of the universe, recognized by people from every tribe, language, people, and nation—the goal of “The Gospel Mission” (p. 83). When Jesus returns, He will make all things new, and with this new “In the beginning…” all of God’s people will live forevermore in their resurrected bodies with our resurrected and reigning Savior.

**What are some benefits for the Christian who thinks regularly about the reality of Christ’s return?**

CHRIST Connection

This present age will come to an end when Christ returns to fulfill His promises and reign with His people for all eternity. The relationship lost in the garden when Adam sinned will be gloriously restored when the garden city of the New Jerusalem is unveiled and Jesus wipes away every tear from every eye. The way to be part of God’s new world is to be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, shed for our redemption.

Continuing the Discussion

Watch this session’s video, and then continue the group discussion using the following guide.

**Why do you think so many people are fascinated by the Book of Revelation?**

**As a Christian, how should we read this book? Why do you think God included this revelation for us?**

***As a group, read Revelation 19:11-16.***

**What names did John use to describe Jesus? What do these names for Jesus tell us about Him?**

**What do the descriptions of Jesus in this passage tell us about the results of His second coming?**

The Rider’s name is Faithful and True. Jesus never fails, and He is consistent in character. He comes to judge the earth precisely because He is faithful and true to God’s will and His character. Furthermore, He is beyond our total understanding and is the ultimate Ruler. Together, these names tell us that Jesus is above all and that His majesty is beyond our comprehension.

***As a group, read Revelation 21:1-5.***

**How would you summarize the message communicated by these images?**

**Why is it significant that the Scripture emphasizes newness throughout this description of heaven?**

The return of Jesus marks the newness of all things. Everything that came as a result of sin—pain, sickness, death, and sadness—will be undone. Christ will restore His creation to as good—or even better—than it had been originally. But most significant of all, the return of Jesus means that humanity will at last live in perfect communion with God. We will know Him as we are known by Him. We will no longer be separated in any way by the barrier of sin. This is the fulfillment of the gospel promise.

***As a group, read Revelation 22:1-5.***

**How do these images connect with the garden of Eden described in Genesis 2? What is the significance of those connections?**

**Based on what you’ve read in Revelation 21 and 22, what are some truths about heaven you can confidently declare?**

Even after reading these passages of Scripture, we still can’t point to many specific details about what heaven will be like. But we can look forward to some wonderful truths we do know about heaven. Through faith, we can stand firm on the belief that heaven is (and will always be) a place where we experience joy, peace, and love in the presence of Christ forever and ever. Amen.

MISSIONAL Application

Record at least one way you will apply the truth of Scripture as a sojourner in this land patiently longing with confidence and urgency for Jesus’ return.

Personal Study 1

**The conquering King will return to judge rebellion.**

***Read Revelation 19:11-16.***

In the Old Testament, God ruled over the people as the King of Israel, but His reign was not sufficient in the hearts of the people. They wanted to be like the other nations (1 Sam. 8:5). God warned them that kings would oppress them and ultimately lead them astray, but they persisted in their demand. So God granted their request and raised up various kings to rule over the people.

One by one the kings failed. Even the faithful and good rulers such as David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah were frail and fallen leaders. But there was always a golden thread woven through the Old Testament pointing toward a coming King who would reign in perfect peace and righteousness (see Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5).

This king has come. He is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. And He is coming again. This is good news, for the true King and the kingdom of righteousness will finally be consummated. Though Jesus secured His kingdom and lordship through His death and resurrection, His recognized reign will at last come to fruition upon His return. And with that will come the last judgment for rebellion against that kingdom.

The images in these verses are at the same time confidence-building and terrifying, for they are images of judgment. For the Christian, this should bolster our confidence. It reminds us that Jesus will not return as a baby, meek and mild, when very few recognized His true identity. That is how He came the first time, when He came as the Suffering Servant. But when Jesus returns, His identity will be clear, and all will see and recognize His power and glory. He is coming again as the conquering King. It is just a matter of time until He returns in full glory and power and makes all things right.

As Christians, then, we can live with confidence in the face of injustice and evil. When we bear witness to such things, it’s easy for us to think that God is not paying attention or that the atrocities of men don’t matter much to Him. After all, the righteous continue to suffer, and the unrighteous continue to prosper. We can very easily, like the psalmist, become frustrated and look to the sky crying, “Where are you God? Are you even noticing?”

But we should not mistake God’s patience for His apathy. He sees. He knows. He cares. And when Jesus returns, He will bring justice and judgment with Him. In this we can have hope and confidence even while enduring wrongs and pain for the cause of Christ.

While the image of Christ returning in authority gives the Christian confidence, it brings terror to the rest of the world. There will come a day when it will be too late. Too late for repentance. Too late for belief. Too late to turn back. Justice will come.

In light of the sureness of God’s judgment, we as Christians should confidently continue on in our gospel mission. We should share the gospel freely and liberally, without fear and with compassion for those not under God’s grace, because the day is coming when King Jesus will judge.

**How can you increase your confidence in the authority and power of Christ?**

**What are the implications of full confidence in the authority and power of Christ for how you live on mission for His kingdom?**

Personal Study 2

**The conquering King will return to make all things new.**

***Read Revelation 21:1-5.***

In the vision God gave to the apostle John, He promised to make all things new. After the destruction of Satan, God will renew the created order of heaven and earth to make it a dwelling place for Himself and Christ’s bride, the church. This echoes a prophecy given to Isaiah: God will create a new heaven and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered (Isa. 65:17).

Let’s consider the characteristics of this new cosmos. We see a new city coming down from heaven from God. He is the One who has prepared and created this new city for Himself and His people.

The Book of Hebrews tells us that Abraham looked forward to a heavenly city whose builder and designer was God (Heb. 11:10). God told Abraham that He would make a people for Himself out of Abraham and that He would give them a land. The promised land that God swore to Abraham was a precursor to the better and heavenly one—a city that God has prepared for His people (v. 16). We have the hope that with the return of Christ, we will dwell as citizens in a “new Jerusalem.”

In this vision, we also receive the wonderful promise of God’s renewed presence with us for eternity. From start to finish, the Bible is the story of God’s redemption of the world. When Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3, they were removed from the garden of Eden, out from the presence of God. But God made a promise to Abraham and his offspring: “I will be their God and they shall be My people.” That promise is woven into the whole story of redemption (see Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:20).

God came to dwell with man in the most intimate of ways, by taking on human flesh (Matt. 1:23; cf. Isa. 7:14). As a result of Christ’s work, God now dwells within every believer through His Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 6:16-18). And at the end of time, God will destroy all sin, renew the earth, raise up our bodies, and dwell with us fully and permanently in a renewed Eden (see Rev. 21:3).

To be in the presence of God for eternity is our greatest promise and hope. David’s one desire was to dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Ps. 27:4). We see in David what man was originally created for—to know God intimately.

Additionally, Jesus said in John 17:3, “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ.”

The purpose for Christ’s first coming was to make a way for us to be in God’s presence. The purpose for His second coming is that we will be present with Him for eternity. If Jesus Himself is the greatest treasure in heaven, then He must be our greatest treasure on earth.

Finally, we see that the new cosmic order will be markedly different than the old one. The old creation was infected by evil and sin, in bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:21). This first creation will melt away and give way to a new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:12-13).

For those who belong to Christ, this eternal home will be a place where death and grief no longer exist. The curse of death will be done away with forever because our perishable, mortal bodies will be renewed into imperishable, immortal bodies. Those who have put their faith in Christ in this world will be free to enjoy and cherish Him for eternity.

**How have you traditionally viewed heaven? What are some popular misconceptions about heaven?**

**Do you long to be in the presence of God each day? Why or why not? What are some changes you can make to ensure you spend time with Jesus?**

Personal Study 3

**The conquering King will return to be with His people forever.**

***Read Revelation 22:1-5.***

What will it be like? What will we experience when the conquering King returns? Revelation 22 gives us the briefest of glimpses, and it is glorious. What we find is a new Eden, one that has remnants of the first garden except this time in a city.

In his vision, the nearer John came to the center of the city, the more like a garden it became. It was like the garden of Eden, only better. A river watered Eden to provide life, and now a river gushed from the throne. As in the garden of Eden the tree of life is in the city. This tree of life mysteriously disappeared after being present in the first human home, but it reappears in the final human home wonderfully producing its fruit every month, unlike any tree now known. The tree’s abundant harvest, as well as the healing effect of the leaves of the tree, show that heaven is filled with everything life-giving and glorious. Everyone there is healthy all the time.

Here, in this city, there is no curse. The curse of sin that came about in the first garden has, right now, infiltrated into every part of our human existence. Our relationships, our priorities, our emotions are all tainted by sin. But someday the curse will be no more. With this curse lifted, there will be only blessing. And that’s when we get to the best part about this future: the throne of God and of the Lamb is there.

God’s desire has always been to live in intimacy with His people. That they may know Him, even as He knows them. That they are fully and completely given over to being His people, for He is their God. This is our future.

Imagine that. In the future, we will no longer be torn in two different directions by the pull of sin and the pull of holiness. We will no longer have our minds wander when we try to focus on the greatness of God. We will no longer feel the temptation of sin and the sorrow that comes after. We will no longer live by faith because we won’t need to any more. We will see the face of Jesus, and we will know Him.

This is truly what makes heaven, heaven. Yes, there are other glorious parts. There will be no more sickness. No more cancer. No more allergies. No more funerals. There will be no more injustice. No more retribution. No more societal struggles. But all of these things flow from the greatest thing of all—unbroken fellowship with God. This is what the entire Christian life points toward. And it’s even bigger than that—this is what the entire story of redemption points toward. God is moving us, as His people, to the moment when we can truly and freely be with Him forever.

It’s coming. We do not know when, but we know it will happen. In light of this, the end of the story—the beginning of eternity—should motivate us to live with urgency. We should unleash the message of the gospel and the work of the kingdom in every way we can, joining God in His mission to restore what has been broken by sin.

As we do so, we would do well to remember that the future is not in doubt. As John recorded the words of Jesus, “These words are faithful and true” (22:6).

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

**Why do you think it’s so important for Christians to have a vision of the future?**

**What are some specific ways you can pursue this vision of heaven even while you are on earth this week?**