

Study 7: The Second Coming

Introduction:

A lot of people, even Christians, get very skittish when it comes time to talk about the “end.” We become very accustomed to the order of things here, and the thought of radical and irreversible change is one we often aren’t particularly fond of. Even though life brings a great deal of stress and worry along with its joys, more often than not that balancing act is one we have grown familiar and comfortable with. So when the idea of the “end” comes out of our peripheral and into our focus, panic begins to set in. Some people take to the internet, posting warnings and correlations between real life events and obscure interpretations of Revelation. Some people stockpile food and take shelter in their backyard bunker. And some people buy every single roll of toilet paper they can find. We’ve seen it all.

But the Bible, which has no shortage of things to say about the “end,” details a much different response to the “end.” In this week’s Bible study we’re going to be looking at just one of the many places where Paul encourages believers to think about the second coming of Christ, when He will come as a judge of the living and the dead, and Creation as we know it, along with everything inside it, will be remade completely. Here’s an encouragement before we begin: Take a deep breath. This isn’t too complicated, and it’s meant for all believers to read and absorb. Keep in mind that the Lord is with us in our study of His word. While some portions of Scripture may be more difficult to understand than others, the Lord has not left us to fend for ourselves when it comes to those difficult portions. That said, let’s open God’s Word together.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

The Day of the Lord

[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.

Discussion:

1. Let’s begin by covering the basics of the second coming. There are things that are helpful prerequisites to looking at our text for today. First among them is how the Second Coming of Christ relates to the first. We live in what scholar’s call the “Already, Not Yet.” Christ has **already** come and won eternal life for all who believe by his death and resurrection; We live in light of this wondrous gift today, and it is why we celebrate, sing, enjoy peace and contentment within ourselves, and why we preach. But at the same time, Christ has **not yet** returned to bring this beautiful redemption to fruition. The redemption that Christ works is total, not partial. This means that Creation, which has

been ravished by sin, will also be redeemed. This also means that those of who hold Christ as our savior will enjoy completely the righteousness we currently only enjoy partially. Today we walk with the knowledge that we are right before the Father, but in the future we will walk together in that Heavenly City! Additionally, we need to recognize that judgement will come on this day. Those who do not stand in the righteousness of Christ will face the due for sin: death and condemnation. **Reflect on these things. What gives you hope? What makes you nervous? What is familiar and what is new to you?**

Leader Notes: This is a good time to cover some of the basics of “eschatology,” or things having to do with the end. Matthew 24:36-51 and 25:31-46 are key texts where Jesus outlines the basic principles of this Second Coming, which Paul here echoes. However, this is also a good opportunity to get a feel of the attitude your group has around the idea of the “end.” If the opportunity arises, take some time to listen to how people respond to this idea, as the response could be helpful in answering later questions or adapting the study to how familiar your group is with these concepts.

2. On the last question, it should come as no surprise that many would rather not believe this type of news. Paul experienced this with many of the people of his day; Some things never change. The imagery he gives is dramatic, describing the day Christ returns as one that will come “like a thief in the night.” This day will invade the supposed security of the world and be utterly inescapable. **What things in this world do you think are false securities? How do you think our world today convinces itself of “peace and security”?**

Leader’s Notes: Encourage your group to think about things such as extreme investment into entertainment, achievement, or pleasures. Be sure to emphasize the way that most people suppress the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel is by replacing it with some other belief concerning the world. Romans 1:18-19 is a key text in understanding this. Show how our world “suppresses the truth in unrighteousness.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

[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. (ESV)

Discussion

1. Immediately after learning about how that day will arrive to the world, we learn how it will arrive to those who are in Christ. Because we don't hold a false peace and security, but rather live in the light of the Gospel, that day isn't unwanted or unexpected. When Paul uses the word "sleep" here he doesn't necessarily mean that Christians don't close their eyes at night to rest. Rather, the play between day and night is a metaphor for how we ought to understand ourselves in this temporary world. Living in the night means being asleep to the larger realities at play. It means wilfully trying to suppress difficult things like righteousness, holiness, and especially the end of this world! But us, being awake to these things, live in what Paul calls the "day." **What are ways that you notice Christians live in the "day" rather than the "night"? What are ways that we often struggle to live in the "day"?**

Leader's Notes: 1 John 1 is a great resource for this idea. Living in the day means living according to what Scripture says about what is right and wrong and what is true and untrue. One of the major ways people reject the truth of the Gospel is by assuming that the truth can't really be known for sure, rather than believing in another system of truth. Practical ways that Christians live in the day can include things like confessing our sins to one another to ask for prayer, participating in Bible study, attending Sunday Worship, regularly praying and reading Scripture, and by seeking mentorship from our elders in the faith. Discuss how we often struggle to do these things because we want to ignore the truth rather than come to it.

2. Finally, let's observe how Paul encourages Christians in light of this coming reality. Surprisingly, it doesn't change much for those already in Christ. The main ethical drive for us in light of the Second Coming of Christ is to **continue**. Specifically, Paul is driving believers to "encourage one another and build on another up." The way we look forward to the Second Coming isn't with a heart full of dread but with a heart full of hope! We know we aren't destined for wrath, but rather for salvation through Christ. **What is the proper response to this reality? How does knowing Christ is returning provide you hope?**

Leader's Notes: The proper response to the reality of Christ's Second Coming is the same as the response to his First Coming: Believe in Him and be saved! For those in Christ, our proper response is to patiently await this day and preach the Gospel until it comes. After this, discuss how the pains of today will be removed tomorrow. This is a good time to share with one another the specific ways in which we hope for that day. Example: "I find the struggles with family and friends very discouraging at times. I find that my relationships are always being ruined or slowly fading away. I can't wait for the day when we'll all live in permanent peace and harmony."

Conclusion:

So, upon hearing about the end, is it time for us to hit the bomb shelter? Or the toilet paper aisle? I sure hope not. We don't have to be full of fear when it comes to the end. Instead, we can patiently wait and hope for the day when Christ will return. Our reaction to knowing the end and knowing the Gospel is the exact same: Repent, believe, and go and make disciples of all the nations! On hearing this good news that Christ will return and set all things right, we should be both full of hope and a desire to share this wonderful news with others.