

Promises

For

Now And Evermore

A Promise of Heaven

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The Most Precious Promise of All

The Second Coming

This promise is still unfulfilled. Second only to salvation it is the greatest promise of all. It is the promise of Jesus Christ coming again. A promise made initially by Jesus, himself. He said to his closest disciples "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." (John 14:1) and "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3)

But there will be some in the last days who will say in scoff, "Where is this Second Coming? Where is this that we've been reading about? Doesn't everything just go on like it always has? The sun comes up in the morning. The sun goes down in the evening. Where is the second coming?" (2 Peter 3:4) By the way there is a doctrine for that. It's a philosophy called "uniformitarianism." You think about it, the name says it all. Everything is uniform. Everything just keeps happening the way it always has. Peter explains there, and says, "Just because the Lord is patient, just because he is waiting hoping that more will come to repentance, don't you think that the promise isn't there." (2 Peter 3:9)

As you go through the New Testament, you'll find promise after promise that Jesus is coming again. Among those promises, you'll find certain things that help us understand it. For example, we're told that no man knows when it'll be as it will come as a thief in the night. (2 Peter 3:10)

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (3:8) Two verses later, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief." That's exactly the same thing 1 Thessalonians 5:1 says, "the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night" Jesus himself said "I don't know the day or the hour, only the Father knows that." (Matthew 24:36)

One of the things I can be sure of whenever I have anybody tell me they know when Jesus is coming back again is that I'm listening to a false prophet. I hear all these things about how we're living in the last days, era or age. The last days started with the birth of the church. We've been living in the last days for 1,900 years, and the world may end tonight. Jesus may come back today, but he may also let this earth stand for 1,900 more years. We simply do not know.

The other things the Bible provides are several characteristics associated with the Second Coming. Paul says, when Jesus comes back again on that great and glorious day, whenever it may be there is going to be from the Christian perspective:

1. A call from the Lord himself
2. A loud command
3. The trumpet call of God
4. The dead in Christ will rise first
5. Those Christians who are still alive on earth at that time will be caught up in the air with the Lord and the dead in Christ who have arisen. (2 Thessalonians 4:16)

Paul also gives us the unbeliever's perspective. "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels." 1. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2. They will be punished with an everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. (2 Thessalonians 1:7)

The same event is described by two markedly different perceptions because that day will look quite different depending upon whether or not you are an obedient believer trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are told elsewhere in Scripture that when the Lord comes again, the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth will be laid bare, that's told to us in 2 Peter 3:10. We're told that when Jesus comes again, it's going to usher in the judgment of all humanity. That's in 2 Peter 3:7, Jude 1:7, a number of other places. So we're told a good bit about what the day of the Lord, the Second Coming of Jesus is going to be like.

For the purpose of this lesson, I don't just want us to know that there is the promise of Jesus coming again, you probably already know that. I don't just want you to know all the characteristics that are going to be associated with that day. What I want us to understand are the day-to-day implications on our lives, right now, because we have the promise of the Second Coming.

Paul deals with the second coming of Jesus and he relates it to the decisions and the attitudes that the Thessalonians needed to embrace because of the reality of that second coming. The reason Paul deals so much with the second coming of Jesus Christ in 1 Thessalonians is because his co-worker, Timothy, had gone to visit the Christians in Thessalonica. Timothy came back and reported three basic things. The Thessalonians

1. Have been persecuted
2. Are standing up well under that persecution.
3. They have been sound in doctrine.
4. They are not given away key elements of the truth.
5. They are concerned about what has happened to those Christians who have died before the Second Coming

It's that last part of Timothy's report that gives us the reason why so much about the promise of the Second Coming is in this first letter to the church at Thessalonica. The following are some nuggets from 1 Thessalonians about the Second Coming and the context that Paul uses to show us what we need to know about day-to-day living.

1. Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians. (verse 2)
2. He remembers their labor, love, and faith. (verse 3)
3. They were a model to all the people in Macedonia. (verse 7)
4. They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (verse 9)
5. They wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Do you see there at the end of verse 10 that reference to the Second Coming? Paul says in that context, he says, while you're waiting for Jesus to come again, I am glad that you've turned from idols to serve the true and the living God. Here is the first thing the promise of Jesus' Second Coming should do for each and every one of us. When it sinks in, when you and I embrace that concept not just intellectually, but right here in the heart, you change your lifestyle.

Peter was the one who gave the graphic description about how Jesus is going to come again how the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will melt underneath the heat, and the earth will be laid bare. Do you know what he says in the next verse? "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?" (Verse 11) That's a good question. We know the end. What kind of people ought we to be? He answers his own question. He says, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."

The promise of Jesus' coming again, motivates us to turn from worldly interest, worldly behavior, and worldly worship, and to turn to godly interest, godly behavior, and godly worship. Somebody says, "Well, wait a minute, Steve, Jesus hasn't come yet. It's been almost 2,000 years and he hasn't come so it may be another 2,000 years. Why do I need to turn to him now?"

Before that question can be answered you realize how foolish it is and how simple the answer is. If you and I surely know a basic axiom of life, it's this: The decisions you make now determine your destiny later. Isn't that right?

The decisions you make now determine your destiny later. If a student is a sophomore in high school and that student wants to go to college, that student has to make a decision right then to take a certain curriculum that will allow him or her to be able to enroll in higher education. If a student starts college, that freshman, if he wants to be a physician one day, has to make a decision right then to engage in a certain curriculum and to do rather well in that curriculum, or he is not going to have a chance to go to medical school.

If I choose to commit a felony right now, then I'm reserving my place in the Folsom Hilton. Isn't that right? Because we want or don't want a certain destiny, we will make the appropriate choices right now. That's the way life is. The biggest of

all destinies and the biggest of all choices is: If I want to meet the Lord in the air, before the fire and the brimstone, I need to make choices about my lifestyle right now.

"For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy." (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20) You may have never read those words before, or really never let them sink in. Paul said, when the Lord comes again, I'm going to receive a crown. He said, you, Thessalonians, are that crown. The Greek word for crown could be used one of two ways, sometimes they use it to refer to a symbol of royalty, you know, a crown on the head of a king or a queen, but they also use it to refer to a crown of victory, the award that an athlete would receive after winning a contest. Well, Paul is alluding to the latter.

He says, "When I stand with Christ in the air at his second coming, and I see you Christians at Thessalonica joining me in the air, that is going to be my crown. That is going to be the greatest reward I ever received, that you are redeemed with me."

Here's the second implication of the Second Coming of Jesus: I want to take somebody with me. In fact, I don't just want to take somebody with me, I want to take several people with me. I want to take my whole family. I don't want anybody to be left out. I'm talking about my biological family, my physical family. I want to take my friends, I want to take every friend I know. I want to take all of you with me. I want to do something, anything to influence you to make that journey with me in the air.

The reason we have prepared this lesson is because we want to say something that will move you to obey the gospel so that you will go with us. If you've ever won someone to Christ, you know a joy that's absolutely unique. There is no greater feeling, there is no greater satisfaction. But listen to me, even that joy will pale beside the joy that you'll feel when you join the Lord in the air and you look across the sky, and you see the face of someone that you influenced for Christ. You see knowing that there is going to be a Second Coming, tells me I need to be looking out for other people spiritually.

Paul states in chapter 3, that the Second Coming of Jesus affects our relationships. Read with me verses 12 and 13 from 1 Thessalonians 3. "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes (see there's the Second Coming) with all his holy ones." Verse 12, here's the implication: Jesus is coming again, so you make sure that your love overflows for other Christians and everybody else you contact. See, that's the main thing.

D. L. Moody once said something that I've always remembered. He said, "The main thing I've learned in my life, is that the main thing is to concentrate on the main thing." Do you know what the main thing is? If you don't, Jesus tells you. He said, the main thing is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And the second main thing is likened to it. It is to love your neighbor as yourself. Knowing that Jesus is coming again, tells me I dare not forget those main things, how about you?

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, is a liar." (1 John 4:20) Is that blunt or what? I mean is that to the point? He goes on in that same verse and says, "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." I'll tell you something that is impossible, absolutely impossible. To love God and to have several hateful relationships with your fellow man. Do you hear that? Don't say you're doing it, because you're not. Don't claim to be a faithful Christian and have relationships full of jealousy, envy, hatred, and strife. John says, "If you can't love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you've not seen?" Paul said, in light of the Second Coming of Christ, I want to get my relationships in order. I really want to love the people around me.

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." (Verses 13 and 14)

This was really the primary reason that Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians. The Second Coming insures life beyond the grave. It's interesting that in Thessalonica they had discovered among the ruins there a stone that had this inscription. They

don't know if it was a part of the building, or if it was erected over a grave, who knows? But the stone says this: "After death, no reviving. After the grave, no meeting again."

Now think about that. Those early Christians could have walked by that inscription, read it and thought is that right. After death, no reviving. After the grave, no meeting again." What about my dad, what about my mom, what about my brother and sister, what about my wife, what about the little child I put in the grave?

Paul says in chapter 4, "Because Jesus is coming back again, don't you worry about them." If a man has lived in Christ, then when he dies, he has died in Christ. Even when he's dead, he's still in Christ and when Jesus comes again, he will rise in Christ.

Romans 8:35 is one of the great questions in the Bible, "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then Paul gives the answer. Nothing. "Neither death or life." (Verse 38) Just because you die doesn't mean you're out of the Lord. That same passage says, "When Jesus comes again, the dead in Christ will rise all over the world to meet him in the air." I can't wait to see that, can you? From Alaska to Argentina, from Bulgaria to Bolivia, from Chile to Chicago, from Denver to Denmark, from Edinboro to Ethiopia, and every person in Christ is going to be up in the air being changed and transformed. The question is: Will you be there? Will you be among the dead in Christ? I am, and it's going to be a beautiful place.

The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus is not just some archaic intellectual promise that makes no difference in your life. It makes all the difference in your life. It makes a difference about every decision you make about the course of your life. It makes a difference about every relationship you have. It makes a difference about what you share with other people. And it makes a difference about how you face death, both your own and those closest to you. It is truly one of the greatest promises in the Bible. *Amazing Grace #1168 -Steve Flatt, July 17, 1994*

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