

The Return of the Lord

Intro:

1. The return of the Lord was heavy on Paul's mind as he wrote Thessalonian epistles. **Every chapter** of 1 Th ends with this topic while almost **half** of 2 Th devoted to it.
2. The Thessalonians were in need of comfort and reassurance; so was Paul after his trials. He counsels them to find that comfort in the Lord's future return (1 Th 4:18; 5:11, 14; 2 Th 2:17).
3. This is a subject that would put our lives, anxieties and problems into perspective *if we would but meditate upon it*. Unfortunately, it is a subject of fear or disinterest to many.

1. Main Passages and Details

A. **Death: No exemption from glory** - 1 Th 4:13-18.

1. "*Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope*" (v 13). Hope is one of the greatest strengths of the human spirit. Hope propels survival, endures disappointment, fights failure. But the *ultimate hope* is to see Jesus come in glory (see 1 Th 2:19).
2. "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven ...*" (v 16). Belief in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus finds fulfillment in His return. The world will not come to a natural end: a cold, icy rock when the sun burns out or a junkyard from meteorite collision or polluted by nuclear fallout.
3. "*And thus we shall always be with the Lord*" (v 17). **Death is not the end!** The lives of our dead loved ones are not ended but merely changed. What will this life seem when countless ages of eternity have passed?! This is the antidote for despair, deprivation.

B. **Preparedness: The Lord could come anytime** - 1 Th 5:1-11.

1. Maturity brings the ability to look into the future, calculate probabilities (or distant certainties) and plan for them. Immaturity only considers here and now.
2. Christians **know** Jesus is coming again, but "*as a thief in the night*" (5:2). We simply do not know when, but it doesn't matter. We must strive to live **as if** it may be tonight. Sin occurs in the hope that His return is **not** now; righteousness is lived in the hope that it **is** now.
3. We are sons of light/day (5:5). Our knowledge and spiritual insights keep us prepared.

C. A Coming of Dual Purpose - 2 Th 1:3-10.

1. The fate of the wicked:

- a. *"It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you"* (1:6). Many wish to dwell only on God's love and mercy and omit His wrath vengeance. But it is altogether *right* for God to punish evildoers.
- b. *"Taking vengeance on those who do not ... obey the gospel of our Lord"* (1:8). We accept that fornicators, drunkards, liars, thieves, etc. will not inherit the kingdom and we are *glad*. But those who refuse to obey the gospel suffer the same fate.
- c. *"Punished with everlasting destruction"* (1:9). Many think that the punishment is annihilation, but "destruction" means the eternal loss of well-being; viz., *"from the presence of the Lord."* Never to behold the goodness of the Lord again or enjoy His blessings.

2. The joy of the righteous:

- a. *"Give you who are troubled rest with us ..."* (1:7). So long as the Lord is unrevealed, His servants will be persecuted by the wicked. But rest is coming.
 - b. *"When He comes in that Day, to be glorified in His saints"* (1:10a). **Then** the world will know the true significance of the Christians whom they persecuted. Saved, redeemed people declare the love, wisdom and providence of God; that sin and death could be so defeated is a glory to God (not to us).
 - c. *"to be admired among all those who believe"* (1:10b). What will it be like to actually **see** the Lord? We commit our lives to Him, live for Him, emulate Him, meditate upon Him, trust in Him ... but to **see** Him? He who is despised by the world is admired by those who believe.
3. What a joyous, frightening, liberating, awesome, horrible **final** spectacle it will be! The rebellious will finally **know** the Lord. They will confess - but too late! The righteous will rise and leave behind the cataclysm of fire, judgment, wrath, terror and hopelessness!

3. Conclusion

- A. Are you **prepared** for that day? Is it a source of **comfort** to you? Do you speak of it? Do you think about it? Do you **long** for it?
- B. Can we say with Paul: *"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing"* (2 Tim 4:8)?