

The Second Advent of Christ – Motivation for Life

When I was in college, I worked two years at a Wendy's restaurant in Kearney, NE. It was actually a great experience. I enjoyed the people I worked for and with. I never saw anything in my two years there that ever made me not want to eat there. It was a clean, well-run store. Now, having said this there were times when the idea of being clean and well-run went to another level – that was when we got word that out-of-town management was coming for a visit. When those visit were impending visit our managers had us clean all sorts of stuff. I remember getting under the fryers and cleaning the wheels and doing all sorts of extra cleaning. We cleaned stuff you didn't even know existed!

I don't remember that we ever knew exactly when they were coming, just THAT they were coming. But knowing THAT they were coming was a huge motivation for how the store was run. My guess is that the level of the cleanliness and the level of diligence and attention to detail at those times was actually consistent with what the "higher ups" wanted from the store all the time even when they weren't coming to visit.

There is a similar kind of motivation for us in the Christian life. Jesus is coming! His return is certain and when we stay clear about this truth it provides powerful motivation for life.

This advent season we are focusing on the second advent of Jesus. We've looked at the contrast between the first and second advents of Jesus. His first advent was characterized by humility and obscurity, whereas His second advent will be characterized by power and great glory. Last week we looked at how the return of Christ is something that we can fix our hope upon as we live life in this difficult world. Today, we are looking at the truth that the return of Christ also serves as a powerful motivator in a believer's life if we maintain a constant expectancy about it.

Article nine of our doctrinal statement is a statement about what we believe about the return of Christ. In the second half of that statement it says this:

. . . . The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

This statement, which affirms that only God knows when Jesus is returning, articulates three areas of motivation that the return of Christ produces in the life of a believer. I want to look at these three areas this morning.

I. **The Return of Christ Motivates Us to Godly Living** (Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:1-3)

We looked briefly at Titus 2:11-14 last week, as Steve talked about this “blessed hope.” I want to look at that passage again today, because in it Paul makes it clear that there is a connection between looking for Christ’s return and living a godly life. Paul writes:

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

The main thrust of these verses is found in verse 11 where he says, “*For the grace of God has appeared*.” This is a reference to the first advent of Christ and all that that meant – His birth, His life, His death and resurrection. When Christ appeared the first time He brought *salvation to all men*. In other words, He made salvation available for all people who would believe in Him.

But Paul adds that this grace is not just about salvation in the future. This grace leads us to live a certain way now. This grace appeared for the purpose of “*instructing*” us how we are to live. It instructs us to *deny ungodliness and worldly desires*. We are to turn away from all actions and thoughts and desires that are opposed to God. Grace teaches us to renounce all of that so we can live, “*sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age*.”

In verse 13, Paul offers a perspective that helps motivate us to live this life of godliness. He says that we deny ungodliness and chose to live in a way that pleases God as we are *looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus*. As Steve mentioned last week, *blessed hope*, and, *appearing of the glory*, refer to Christ’s second coming.

And so, we live in the here and now, pursuing a life of godliness by earnestly looking for the second appearing of Christ. 1 John 3:3 says that whoever has his hope fixed on Jesus’ return purifies himself. As we stay clear about the truth that Jesus really is returning, it serves as a powerful motivation to godly living.

If you knew that Jesus would show up tomorrow, how would you live today? Are there things in your life that you would choose to deny or renounce? Are there godly things that you would you choose to pursue with more fervor? Jesus is coming! He is! It COULD be today. It COULD be tomorrow. We don’t know, when, but we do know THAT He is coming. And if we can stay clear about this truth it motivates us to godly living.

Secondly, the return of Christ motivates us to sacrificial service.

II. The return of Christ motivates us to sacrificial service (1 Peter 4:7-11)

Look at 1 Peter 4:7–11. Peter writes:

⁷ The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit . . .

Here Peter doesn't use the language of Christ's appearing, but in saying that *the end of all things is near* he is referring to the same truth. He is communicating that we are living in last days – days when Jesus could return at any time. And since this is true he says that we should live with *sound judgment and sober spirit*. In other words, we live consistently in light of the truth that Jesus could return at any time. And out of this conviction, we serve. Peter lists several ways that we should serve. He says:

. . . for the purpose of prayer. ⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaint. ¹⁰ As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Peter is particularly focusing on how we serve one another in the body of Christ. We pray for one another. We love with a kind of love that overlooks a multitude of sins. We show hospitality to without any complaining. And we serve one another with whatever gift God has given us. These expressions of service are consistent with having sound judgment and a sober spirit that the end is near; that Christ could return at any moment.

When we live with expectancy about the return of Christ, it gives fuel and focus to how we live with each other. It motivates us to live with the kind of spiritual intensity that Peter expresses in this passage. It motivates us to live lives of sacrificial service.

As you think about the kinds of things Peter describe here – prayer, and loving one another, and showing hospitality, and using whatever gifts God has given you – how might the intensity of these things be heightened in your life if you knew that Jesus was returning tomorrow? Sometimes serving in these ways are hard. They call for real sacrifice at times. But such sacrificial service do make sense in light of Jesus' return.

And so the return of Christ motivates us to godly living; it motivates us to sacrificial service; and, finally,

III. The return of Christ motivates us to energetic mission (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:4-11)

After Jesus' resurrection and before He ascended back to the Father, he imparted a mission to His disciples. This mission was not only for the first disciples; it is our mission as well. And when we live with expectancy that Jesus could return at any time, it helps us engage this mission in an energetic way.

Matthew 28:18-20 is one of the passages where Jesus lays out the mission. Shortly before Jesus ascended back to heaven, he said this:

¹⁸ "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Our mission is to *make disciples of all the nations*. A disciple is a follower of Jesus. And so we are given the mission of helping people come to faith in Jesus and then to live as a disciple of His. This involves baptizing them and teaching them all that Jesus taught. The fact that Jesus says here that He will be with us *even to the end of the age* makes it clear that this is the Church's mission until He returns.

Now, I want to read one other passage in the book of Acts that connects the return of Christ to this mission. In Acts 1 starting in verse 4, we read this:

⁴ Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Jesus promises that His Spirit would come and would be an empowering Presence in the lives of all Christ followers and that the Spirit would enable the Church to give witness to Jesus. And you see the scope of the mission again here when Jesus says that this message of salvation in the name of Jesus will go *to the remotest part of the earth*.

⁹ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. ¹¹ They also said, "Men of Galilee, why

do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

And so Jesus returns to the Father before the very eyes of His disciples. His first advent comes to an end. And as the disciples are standing there looking up into the sky, two angels appear to them and speak of the Second Advent - *This Jesus . . . will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”*

And so the disciples return to Jerusalem and they gather with all the followers of Christ and they wait for the promised Holy Spirit. And on the day of Pentecost the Spirit is poured out upon them and this mission of being witnesses is launched (Acts 2). The rest of the book of Acts then is the story of the early church engaging this mission. They were absolutely clear about the mission that Jesus had given them. They were empowered by the Spirit. And they were motivated by the truth that Jesus was coming back soon and so they were energetic in that mission. And they changed their world!

We have the same mission; the same empowering Spirit dwelling within us; and, we have the same knowledge that Jesus is returning. We need to let that truth motivate us to be energetic in this mission.

If you were here last week, you know that we commissioned Tim and Emily Relihan to go as missionaries to the Dominican Republic. This is one way that we are energetic in this mission. We believe that in light of the truth that Jesus is returning that this kind of mission makes sense. But mission is not just about people going to far away places; it is also about how we live here. Mission is about caring that there are people around us who do not yet know Christ and doing what we can to help them take steps towards Christ.

If you knew that Jesus was coming back soon, how would that affect how you think about and interact with the people in your life who don't know Jesus? Without a doubt when I stay clear about the truth that Jesus is returning, it makes me care about where people stand with God. It makes me want to do what I can. My guess is that it makes you want to do what you can as well.

So, what can you do? Let me mention four things that you can all do. First, you can **pray**. Pray that God will do a work in a person's heart to create interest and openness to spiritual things.

Second, **pursue**. Pursue honest friendships with people who are far from God. Don't make them some kind of project. Just develop a friendship. Do stuff that friends do. And trust that as you do that, God will be at work.

Third, **point**. Point them to Christ. There are all sorts of ways that you can point people to Christ. You can do this as you share honestly about your life and ways that God is

working. You can do this by inviting them to something like the Christmas Eve service. You can do this by inviting them to take Alpha with you. You can give them a book.

Finally, **prepare**. Be prepared to communicate your own story of how you came to know Jesus. Be prepared to communicate in clear and simple ways the message of the Gospel. Let me mention an opportunity that is coming up next semester that offers one way that helps you prepare. I will be teaching a class called *Just Walk Across the Room* on Wednesday nights. It is a video-based curriculum that helps people learn some very simple and non-weird ways to point people to faith in Christ. Most people who go through this class have the reaction, "I can actually do this! And I want to!" And so think about checking that out if you sense a need to be a little bit more prepared for the mission.

The Second Advent of Christ is a great motivation in life. It motivates us to godly living; it motivates us to sacrificial service; and, it motivates us to energetic mission.

In the summer of 1993, when Cindy and I were still on staff with Cru, we were attending our national staff conference in Colorado. While there we heard about the need for year-long teams to go serve in various places in Eastern Europe. Obviously, this was shortly after the fall of communism and so there was this great opportunity to go. And so we began to pray about it.

As I prayed about it, I struggled with what it would mean for us. At the time we had two young children and we had people tell us that we shouldn't go, because it would be too hard on the kids. And honestly, as I thought and prayed about it, I wondered how hard it would be for us? Over time I realized as I was processing this decision that I'm so drawn to comfort. I want to have a comfortable life. Well, as the time drew near when we really needed to make a decision, I took a day to spend with God to pray about this decision. And when it got right down to it I realized that this longing for comfort was the thing that I was wrestling with. Could I let go of that? At one point during that day, God communicated to my heart a truth that was so clear and so powerful. I sensed that He was saying to me, "Heaven is your home. Live for the values of heaven." I realized that my longing for comfort in this life was not necessarily a value of heaven. That day I decided that God was indeed calling us to go and serve in Hungary for a year and that whatever sacrifice would be involved would make sense in light of the values of heaven.

The second advent of Christ reminds us that this life is not all that there is. We are living for another world – an eternal world. And when we live with this truth, this hope, it motivates us to pursue godly lives; and to live lives of sacrificial service; and to be energetic in mission.

Amen.