

The Church Caught Up

We've talked about the church grown up, prayed up, linked up, and fired up. This morning we are going to talk about the church caught up! Hear the word of the Lord from the apostle Paul. **“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**

We believe a day is coming when the church, all those who have placed their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord will be caught up together to be with him. It is a day of resurrection as the dead in Christ, those who loved and served him, will rise from the dead and those who are still alive will be caught up together with them to be together, in his presence, forever. The Lord is coming again and the church is going to be caught up!

Does it sound crazy? Far-fetched? Like a science fiction movie? Yes, so why do we believe this? We believe it because for two thousand years, from the apostles on, it has been the consistent teaching of the church. Jesus is coming again. The Apostles Creed that we frequently recite, the Nicene Creed, the great confessions and statements of truth from all of the Christian churches and branches of faith all believe in and refer to the Lord's return. There may be differences of opinion about when or how it will transpire, or whether it refers to the rapture of the church or the 2nd coming, but all Christians believe the Lord is coming again!

When Jesus ascended into heaven in Acts 1 the angels told the disciples, **“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11** He was caught up in the clouds, a symbol and sign of God's glory and the bible tells us he will be coming again in the clouds, in God's glory.

We believe the Lord is coming again because the bible says so! When you consider all the Scripture that refers to the day of the Lord or the coming of the Lord, his return, this isn't a minor theme. David Jeremiah in his book *Jesus' Final Warning* states **“There are 1,845 references to that event in the Old Testament; a total of seventeen Old Testament books give it prominence. Of the 216 chapters in the New Testament, there are 318 references to the Second Coming, or one out of every thirty verses...For every biblical prophecy on the first coming of Christ, there are eight concerning His second coming.”** David Jeremiah

Jesus taught that he was coming again. **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” Matthew 24:42.** We hear this warning throughout the New Testament, to be ready because the Lord is coming. We hear it from Paul. **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 3:20.** We hear it from James, **“You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” James 5:8.** We hear it from Peter. **“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.” 1 Peter 4:7.** We hear it from John, **“Little children it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” 1 John 2:18.** We hear it in the last words of the Bible. **“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!” Revelation 22:20**

The Lord is coming. The encouragement to press on is there because the Lord is coming. The warning is there, to be ready, watching and waiting, because the Lord is coming. If the first century saints expected his return, how much more should we be prepared, but we’ve grown complacent. We are busy going about our lives and we don’t give thought to the coming of the Lord. Jesus warned about this in Matthew 24. **“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” Matthew 24:37-39**

People have looked at that passage and tried to say it’s a sign of the Lord’s return, that more people are marrying and eating and drinking than ever. That’s not the point. The point is the normalcy, the complacency found in everyday life. People in Noah’s day and our day are just taking it one day at a time, living their lives, but ignoring the warnings of Noah and of the Scripture. No one paid attention until the door of the ark was shut and the rain began to fall. In the same way, no one pays attention to the warnings of Scripture, or to the warnings of preachers from the pulpit, until the day when the Lord returns and the church is caught up to be with him and then.... Then, “two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.” Those left behind will have reason to pay attention but sadly, it’s too late.

Noah preached for 120 years as he built the ark and no one, not one responded to his warning. No one repented and turned to the Lord. “Flood? It didn’t rain yesterday and it’s not going to rain today.” Peter spoke of this, of those who said, **“Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.” 2 Peter 3:4-7**

What is Peter saying? He is saying that before the Lord’s return it will be like it was in the days before the flood. Because judgment hasn’t come, because the Lord hasn’t returned, people think it isn’t going to happen. Just because it hasn’t happened doesn’t mean it won’t happen. Jesus is coming! Jesus said, **“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Matthew 24:44**

Skeptics mock and laugh at the idea of doomsday, of Jesus coming again, of judgment. Even in the church world it seems the Lord’s return has been pushed to the back of the line, replaced by what are considered to be more relevant topics. But thirty seconds after the trumpet sounds and the Lord returns for his saints, it’ll be the most relevant topic around and people will be asking, “why didn’t someone tell me?”

Why does the coming of the Lord matter? Because the Lord’s return is, or at least it should be, one of the central motivating factors of the church. We are going to be caught up someday. Let me share four ways the Lord’s return should motivate the church.

The Lord is coming: purify yourselves. The coming of the Lord is a motivating factor for the church to live pure and holy lives. John wrote, **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” 1 John 3:2-3**

If we are going to live with him in heaven, we need to live like him on earth. He is our example, of holiness and purity, of morality and righteousness. Follow him. Serve him. Live for him. Our hope is found in living a life of obedience to Christ. Just before this verse John writes, **“And now dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” 1 John 2:28.** He is telling us we need to live a

morally pure life so that when he appears, we will have no reason to draw back in shame or to try to hide from him. Jesus is coming. Are you ready?

If Jesus looked at your computer or your phone, how concerned would you be about your internet history, about the language or pictures in your text messages? If he was coming to your house, would there be things you needed to hide? If he was spending the day with you, would you need to change the way you live and talk? Listen, he already knows how you live and what's on your phone and your laptop. He is coming for a church that has washed and made ourselves clean through his grace. We are supposed to live clean and stay clean. John said to continue in him. This is no time to take a break from living a pure and holy life.

Jesus is coming, as a bridegroom coming for a bride. He expects us to be pure, not giving ourselves to other lovers but kept chaste for him, our heavenly groom. Paul used this as an example when he wrote, **“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”** Ephesians 5:25 Holy and blameless, without stain or blemish. How are we living church? The Lord is coming for a bride that has kept herself holy. We need to get our hearts right with God while we have time and opportunity.

The Lord is coming: adjust your priorities. I'm not suggesting you quit your job and just warn people about the coming of the Lord. Saints have done that before, predicting the Lord's return, they sold everything, gave away all their money and sat waiting on a mountain top for the Lord to come. Eventually they walk away puzzled, defeated, and broke. I'm not talking about that kind of misguided faith, but I'm talking about examining the priorities of our life in light of his promise to return. Peter speaks of the coming of the Lord and the judgment that will follow his return. He says the **“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief...and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”** 2 Peter 3:10-11.

The Lord is coming and eventually this earth will be judged and purged. Since everything will be destroyed, Peter is suggesting we live with our hearts and priorities set on heavenly things, on relationships, on things that will last rather than focusing on possessions that will be burned and destroyed in a single moment of time.

The Lord is coming. What kind of people then should we be? People driven by desire for the almighty dollar, driven by desire for man's acclaim, or driven by a desire to serve Jesus and accomplish all we can for him and for his kingdom? Jesus is coming. Only what we do for Jesus is going to last through eternity.

The Lord is coming. Maybe sooner than we think. How should you be living? Peter continues referring to the Lord's return, **"So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."** **2 Peter 3:14** Jesus is coming. Pleasing him, living for him, serving him should be our top priority!

The Lord is coming: win the lost. There has always been an urgency about evangelism for the church. Even if the Lord doesn't return for a thousand years, the time and opportunity for each individual to repent and come to Christ for salvation is limited. In Luke 14 Jesus told the parable of the Great Banquet. It seemed to be an illustration for the end of days and the coming of the Lord. The one giving the banquet sends his servant to announce to all those invited, **"Come, for everything is now ready."** Sadly, excuses were made as to why the invited guests would not be attending. Finally, the master said, **"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame...Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in so that my house will be full."** **Luke 14:21-24**

Everything is now ready. It's time for the Lord to return, to gather his people home for the great banquet. Notice three things about the instructions to the servant. Everything was ready. Time was short so the servant is told to **go quickly** -- there is an urgency. We don't have much time. ...**go everywhere** -- to the streets and alleys of the town, to the highways and the country lanes, to the ends of the earth, go and tell and ...**go to everyone** -- to the blind and crippled, the poor, those forgotten and overlooked -- go and tell everyone they are invited, there is a place for them. The gospel, the good news is for everyone who will repent and believe.

Everything is ready. The Lord is coming. The church is going to be caught up, but there are too many folks that are going to be left behind. We have to go quickly, we have to go everywhere, we have to go to everyone and tell them Jesus is coming and he wants them to be saved.

We are running out of time. Jesus said, **"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."** **John 9:4.** Jesus was telling us we have limited time and opportunity. Work while we can work. Work while the door is open.

Tell others about Jesus while we can, while they can hear, while they can respond and repent. Don't wait until the night has come and the opportunity is lost. Here is the fourth thing we need to do in light of the Lord's soon return.

The Lord is coming: encourage one another. The Lord is coming and there are folks all around us that have become discouraged, some have lost their way, they've dropped out of church, they've gone missing from our ranks. If we really believe the Lord is coming, shouldn't we be encouraging them to renew their faith, to call upon the Lord, to get their heart right and their house in order? The writer of Hebrews said, **"See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the Living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."** Hebrews 3:12-13

The Lord is coming -- encourage one another every day. Don't let sin deceive you or cause you to harden your heart against God. Church, we have a responsibility to encourage one another. We are running out of time! It's urgent!

The writer continues, **"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching."** Hebrews 10:23-25

The Lord is coming so let's spur one another on toward love and good deeds. The Lord is coming. Let's make sure our heart and life is pure. The Lord is coming, let's adjust our priorities and make Jesus first and foremost in our lives. The Lord is coming, let's go quickly, everywhere, to everyone, and tell them Jesus saves. The Lord is coming, let's encourage one another.

The Lord is coming. What do you want to be doing when he comes for you? I want to be found faithful! I want to be found working for him. I want to be found living like Jesus so I can live with Jesus forever. I want us to be living like the church is supposed to be: grown up, prayed up, linked up, and fired up so when he returns we can be caught up! **We are going to be caught up – live like it!**

It won't be long, till we'll be leaving here. It won't be long, we'll be going home!