

Imminent! Part 3

Welcome to part 3 of Imminent! If you've missed the first two messages, you can go to our website and find them. You can even pull up a manuscript of the sermon to read if you prefer. We are talking about the imminent return of the Lord and the impact that belief has upon us as followers of Christ. Imminent, you recall, means "appearing as if about to happen; likely to happen without delay; impending." Events happening in our world make it appear as if the coming of the Lord could happen without delay. We believe Jesus is coming again.

The past two Sundays we emphasized the fact that the first followers of Jesus, the disciples and members of the early church expected the Lord to return in their lifetime. They were living in anticipation of his coming and that expectation, that anticipation had a profound effect upon their lives. It should have a similar impact upon our lives as well. We are looking at five ways the imminent return of the Lord impacts the church. (Let me give credit once again to our former General Superintendent Dr. George Wood who spoke at a conference years ago and shared these five points I'm referencing in this series.) In the first message we said, **The hope of our Lord's imminent return provides a powerful incentive for right living in our daily life.** The expectation that the Lord could come today moves us to live holy lives, turning away from sin and living in a way that pleases the Lord. Last Sunday we said, **The Lord's imminent return motivates us to risk greatly for the King and his Kingdom.** The Lord's imminent return moves us to change our priorities, it causes us to view our life from an eternal perspective. The Lord is coming and what we do for the King and his Kingdom, we must do now, while there is still time and opportunity. Here is the third way his imminent return impacts the church.

The Lord's imminent return steadies our resolve to endure to the end. I've heard people talk about covid fog, that the virus can dull your thinking. I think this pandemic has had something of that effect on everyone. Families, businesses, the church, we are all kind of in a fog. Life itself apart from covid can leave you in a fog. Pressure, stress, fatigue, we just start to think, "What's the use? What's the point in going on? I feel lost! I just want to escape, to get out of here. If only I could see where I'm going – to see what's ahead."

Florence Chadwick was a swimmer. More than a swimmer, she was the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions, breaking the record both ways. In 1950 she swam from France to England in 13 hrs 23min and the next year she swam from England to France in 16hrs 22min. She swam the Channel (approx. 21 miles) a total of four times. On July 4, 1952

Florence attempted to swim the 26 miles from Catalina Island to the California Coast. The water was numbing cold. She had people in boats to assist her, watching for and driving away sharks with rifle fire. Eventually a thick fog settled in, so thick she could hardly see the boats in her party. After 15 hours of swimming in that fog she began to doubt her own ability. She told her mother who was in one of the boats she didn't think she could make it. She swam for another hour before asking to be pulled from the water, unable to see the coastline in the fog. Sitting in the boat, she found out she stopped swimming less than 1 mile from the shoreline. She said, "I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it." Two months later she tried again. The thick fog returned, but this time she kept a mental image of the shore line in her mind and she made it to California, setting a new record. She would cross that distance from Catalina to California two more times in her career.

Have you experienced that kind of fog that shuts you down, that wearies you to the point that it dissolves your resolve? You lose sight of the shoreline. You can't see ahead. Spiritually, you take your eyes off of Jesus, off of his return, off of the promise of heaven and you lose heart. You start to think it's not worth the effort, the sacrifice. Remember, the promise is to those who endure to the end, who overcome, who refuse to quit, in spite of the fog.

James writes, **"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."** James 1:12. I get it. It's more than difficult, it's exhausting, swimming in the fog, pushing against the trials and pressures of life. But there is a promise and when you have stood the test, after you've refused to quit in spite of the trial, you'll receive the crown of life, eternal life with Him. Don't stop in the fog!

James encourages us again in his letter. **"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."** James 5:7-8 When is the Lord coming? How long do we have to wait? It seems like the wicked are winning and the righteous are losing. When is he going to come and make things right, to settle accounts with the wicked? James says, "Be patient, like a farmer. Crops don't grow over night. Keep watering, keep pulling up the weeds, keep guarding the crop. Stand firm. Be patient and don't give up because the Lord is coming. The Apostle Paul writes, **"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we**

do not give up.” Galatians 6:9 Don’t give up. James says his coming is near. Be patient because a harvest is coming. Promises will be fulfilled at his coming. I know you can’t see it yet, you can’t tell that anything is growing, you can’t see progress, you can’t tell that Jesus is coming, but keep obeying Him. Be resolved to endure to the end. Live for Jesus and remain faithful until he returns! It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus!

“But I’m so tired. The fog is so thick. I’ve lost sight of the shoreline, lost sight of heaven. I don’t think I can make it. I’ve lost confidence.” Listen to the writer of Hebrews. **“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.” Hebrews 10:35-39.**

You feel you can’t make it, but don’t throw away your confidence. You aren’t doing this simply based on what you can or cannot see. We’re walking by faith. We live by faith in the One who promised to see us through, the One who promised to be with us, the One who promised us eternal life, the One who promised to prepare a place for us and take us home to be with him some day. Keep going because when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He promised. We aren’t those who shrink back and are destroyed, who give up, who quit and lose their faith. Some will. Some will say it’s too hard. Some will give up in the fog. But let’s be determined to be those who believe and keep on believing, who trust and keep on trusting in Jesus! In just a very little while, He who is coming will come. Hold on! Don’t throw away your confidence in the Lord. Keep trusting.

Jesus told the church in Philadelphia, **“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” Revelation 3:11** Someone is trying to take your crown from you. The enemy is trying to defeat you, to make you lose sight of Jesus and heaven and eternity. Don’t let anyone steal your crown! Jesus warned, **“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Matthew 24:12-13** The enemy wants to steal your crown. He wants to persuade you to give up. Wickedness starts to crowd out our sold-out devotion to the Lord and causes our love for him to grow cold. We take our eyes off of the prize, but he who stands firm to the end will be

saved. Jesus is coming. His return is imminent so don't give up on Jesus. Don't give up on your faith. Don't give up on the church. Now's not the time to quit, to give up. More than ever, now is the time to press in. Hold on to what you have. Stand firm!

Jesus is coming but let me remind you, He is also with you, right now. In the fog, in the fatigue, in the craziness, in the trials and testing, he is with you! We talk about his imminent return as the blessed hope. Let his imminent return fuel you with fresh hope. The writer of Hebrews gives us this word of encouragement. **"...we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."** Hebrews 6:18-20 Run to Jesus and take hold of the hope being offered to you. Overwhelmed? Lost in the fog? Here. Reach out and take hold of the hope being offered to you. Jesus is here and there is hope for you now! Don't give up. Hold on to the hope you have in Christ. You're going to make it.

Look at this image the writer gives us. Take hold of the anchor of hope. If it feels like you are lost and drifting in the fog, Jesus offers you an anchor for the soul, an anchor of hope. Look where this anchor is. Not resting in the bottom of the ocean somewhere. Our anchor is up, not down. Jesus took the anchor into the Heavenly Holy of Holies with Him. We have a life line of hope anchored in God's grace, anchored and secure in God's very presence in the inner sanctuary, behind the curtain. It's anchored to His mercy. We have an anchor we can hold on to and it will never move. Hebrews says it is firm and secure. Hold onto that anchor of hope because one of these days Jesus is going to take us out of this fog and into his glorious presence to be with him forever.

The Apostle Paul understood about feeling overwhelmed, about being in the fog, but he also understood about this anchor of hope. Listen to what he tells the church at Corinth. **"We do not want you to be uninformed about the hardships we suffered...We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life...Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope..."** 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

I'm not telling you there won't be times when it feels like you are swimming in the fog. I'm not telling you that you won't be tested or tried, but I'm telling you to keep relying on the

Lord, the one who even raises the dead. Keep looking to him and know that he is coming for a church that is ready, that is watching for him, that is looking for him and to him. Let the promise of his imminent return boost your resolve to keep setting your hope in the Lord.

Florence Chadwick was less than one mile from the California shoreline. After 15 hours and without the shoreline in sight, she was ready to quit. She swam another hour remember, 16 hours, but then she gave up. She couldn't see through the fog so she gave up. What can you see today? What can you see with eyes of faith? Through the fog can you get a glimpse of Jesus? A glimpse of the shoreline of Heaven? The writer of Hebrews says, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”**
Hebrews 12:2-3

Don't grow weary. Don't lose heart. Don't lose confidence. “But I can't see through the fog.” Look with eyes of faith. Like Florence Chadwick, get a picture of him, reach out to him and grab hold of that anchor of hope and don't let go and know that he won't let go either! He's holding on to you. Let the promise of his imminent return motivate you to endure, to keep going. Andre' Crouch said, “It won't be long till we'll be leaving here, it won't be long, we'll be going home. Count the years as months, counts the months as weeks, count the weeks as days, any day now, we'll be going home.” Don't give up. We're almost home. His return is imminent! Don't lose your confidence. By his grace we will make it!

If you feel like giving up, you feel like you are in the fog and you can't keep going, I want to pray for you! Look to Jesus. Put your hope in the Lord.