

Imminent! Part 5

We have been examining **Five ways the imminent return of the Lord impacts the church**. So far we have said the imminent return of the Lord:

1) Provides a powerful incentive for holy and righteous living in our daily life.

2) Motivates us to risk greatly for the King and his Kingdom.

3) Steadies our resolve to endure to the end.

4) Fills us with the anticipation of reward.

This morning we are looking at the fifth way the coming of the Lord impacts the church. **5) The imminent return of the Lord makes us long for reunion with Christ.**

I love reunions. Family reunions, church reunions, class reunions. I had dinner Friday evening with some friends from my elementary school days. Up until last October, I had not seen a couple of these friends in 54 years. It's amazing how the years roll back as you reminisce and think of childhood days. At the heart of reunion is relationship. I saw these classmates every school day for six years and then I took a 54 year break, but strangely enough, the relationship is still there. Memories are shared. Relationships are renewed.

The heavenly reunion we are talking about this morning is based on relationship. We have a relationship with Jesus. Through faith he became the Savior and Lord of our life. We live in relationship to Him, in relationship with him. Paul said in Jesus we live and move and have our being. Our life is in Him. He promised to be with us, to never leave us or forsake us, and he is with us by His Holy Spirit, yet at the same time we know he is not physically present with us. Paul said, **"As long as we are at home in the body we are [absent] away from the Lord."** **2 Corinthians 5:6** We long to see him, to be with him. We long for and anticipate reunion.

In John 13 Jesus tells the disciples he is going away. He tells them, **"Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."** **John 13:36**. He then tells them in John 14, **"Don't let your hearts be troubled... I'm going to prepare a place for you...and I will come back and take you to be with me so you can be where I am."** **John 14:1-3** He is speaking of his coming as a reunion. We will be together again and at that time, we'll be with him forever. In the meantime, between his leaving and his return, the relationship remains intact in spite of the separation of distance and time. The promise is, "I'm coming back and then there will be a reunion!" He tells them in John 16, **"In a little while you will see me no more, and then after**

a little while you will see me. I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.” John 16:19-20

Our grief will turn to joy. Jesus speaks of this separation and uses words we understand: troubled hearts, weep, mourn and grief. Yes, He said he would send the comforter, the Holy Spirit who would be with us and we would never be alone in that spiritual sense, but it is still a separation. Imagine how the disciples must have felt, how they must have missed him and longed for him after the ascension. There was sorrow in their hearts but that sorrow will turn someday into a joy-filled reunion. And though we have never seen him, He is the one we have loved and served and lived for and worshiped and grown to know and adore. Like the disciples, we too long for him and one of these days we will be re-united with him and our sorrow will turn to joy!

I remember once, the girls were young and we went to Eureka Springs to the Christ of the Ozarks. I said we are going to go see Jesus. We got to the statue and Rebekah began crying, inconsolable, “I want to see Jesus.” She didn’t want a statue, not an imitation, she wanted to see the real Jesus. In 2nd Timothy 4 the apostle Paul speaks of “all who have longed for his appearing.” Rebekah was longing for his appearing. The promise of his imminent return makes us long for his appearing. Even so, come Lord Jesus. I want to see Jesus. We sing, “Oh I want to see him, look upon his face, there to sing forever of his saving grace. On the streets of glory, let me lift my voice, cares all past, home at last, ever to rejoice.” There is a reunion coming and we will see Jesus and our sorrow and grief will turn to joy.

This reunion is more than reminiscing about old times. It’s the completion of redemption, it’s a re-uniting where all things are made new, whole. The Apostle Paul states **“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” 1 Corinthians 13:12.** The Imminent return of the Lord makes us long for this reunion where we shall see Him face to face. In that moment, all the things that cloud our vision will be removed. Now, we see Jesus through our own skewed vision, through cultural or ethnic or political lenses that may not exactly give us an accurate view, but on that day, what is now but a poor reflection will be a clear image. No longer a reflection, no longer an image pixilated by sin or human weakness or by our failures and scars or misunderstandings or anything else, but we will see Jesus face to face! We will understand, the mystery, the questions swallowed up by sight. Insight into our own personhood,

our own personality and character will be complete because we will see him and know Him without limitation. We'll share in his glory. The one seated on the throne in Revelation 21 says, "I am making everything new! Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true." What a reunion with Jesus, all things new in his presence. Do you long for his appearing? Everything made new. All the brokenness of sin and wickedness healed. Everything made right.

John writes, **"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** We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. No wonder we should be longing for his appearing. Paul says in Romans 8 that all of creation is groaning for redemption and we too are groaning, waiting for the completion of our adoption, we are waiting for that reunion when we will be with him and be made like him ("the redemption of our bodies"). We are going to be like him! Lord, we long for that day. What a glorious and perfect reunion!

It's not only Jesus that we are longing to see and be with. There is a reunion with the saints of God that awaits us as well. Those who placed their trust in Jesus and served him and lived for him, they died in the faith and there is a reunion with those saints awaiting us.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians to new believers about the coming of the Lord. Apparently in the short time since the founding of the church and the writing of his letter, some believers had died. They were anticipating the Lord's return but perhaps family members were concerned their death might mean they would miss his return and the reunion and reward that was promised. Paul writes, **"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. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 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 4:13-18**

Do you see that? We are going to be caught up together “with them” – with the saints of God who have already died and we are all going to meet the Lord and be together forever. That sounds like a reunion to end all reunions.

I don’t know how to even try to explain what this will be. Paul once again declares, **“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”** **Philippians 3:20-21**

We are going to have a body like his glorious body. A body that won’t wear out, a body that is no longer burdened down by time, or failure, or mistakes of the past, or the marks of sin and suffering and disease. I believe that reunion with Jesus, when he wipes the tears from our eyes and makes all things new, that reunion with all the saints of God will be like nothing we can conceive. All the things that might have once separated us will be gone. Reunited without the scars that might have been inflicted by others. For those who have suffered from dementia or loved ones who are being affected by that, we will be reunited with our memories as well as with our loved ones. We are eagerly awaiting our Savior because he is going to bring everything under his control and make everything new. What a glorious day that will be.

Reunion. Together forever, with Jesus and with all of God’s saints. John got a glimpse of what that reunion will look like and he shared it with us in the Revelation. **“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’...Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes – who are they and where did they come from?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”**
Revelation 7:9-17

I don't think these are just the ones who have come through the Great Tribulation, some 7 year period, I think this multitude represents all of us, every child of God who has trusted in Jesus and has born the hardships of life and faith, who has struggled against sin in the heat of the day. It's reunion with all of God's saints around the throne as he wipes the tears from our eyes and we will be home! Glory to God! We long for the reunion that is to come, with Jesus and with the saints of God. Gathered home at last!

If you don't know Jesus as Savior and Lord, I urge you to turn to him today. He died on the cross for you, then after three days he rose again, conquering death and the grave and he lives forever. He is coming again to take all those who have repented and trusted in him for salvation home to be with him one of these days. Ask him to forgive your sins, to come into your heart and life. You don't want to miss heaven. You don't want to miss that reunion. It is offered to all who come to him in repentance and faith.

There is nothing we are taking with us when the Lord returns, but the relationships we have with those who know the Lord, those we take with us. We are going to be together in the Lord's presence. Bro. Newburn, our former District Superintendent used to say, "I love you. You know how much? I plan on spending eternity with you." I'm glad to be part of his church, the body of Christ. We are going to spend eternity together and with joy today we anticipate that reunion that is awaiting us!

We are receiving new members into our church this morning. As I call your name please come forward and stand here at the front facing the congregation. The pictures will appear on the screen since we have people joining in both services.

(Read list of names)

We are glad you are a part of us. This is your church. We are better together, better because you bring your gifts and talents and resources and your wisdom and experience and join with us and I believe you will be better because we collectively bring our gifts and talents and resources and wisdom and experience and join with you. Together we are the body of Christ and together we live for him and serve him. Together we can make a difference in this world.

I want to read something I've been reading to new members for the past 36 years. It was written by Pastor Jerry Cook in his book *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness*.

“We are committed to you. You’ll never knowingly suffer at our hands. We will never say or do anything, knowingly, to hurt you. We will always, in every circumstance, seek to help you and support you. If you’re down and we can lift you up, we’ll do that. Anything we have that you need, we’ll share with you and if need be we’ll give it to you. No matter what we find out about you and no matter what happens in the future, either good or bad, our commitment to you will never change. And there’s nothing you can do about it. You don’t have to respond. We just love you and that’s what it means.”

Welcome to Carbondale Assembly of God. You’re family now. Let’s pray and then I hope everyone will join me in welcoming these newest members of our church family.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen