

## **Imminent! Part 2**

We are continuing our sermon series: Imminent! If you heard last Sunday's sermon you know we shared multiple Scriptures that speak of the imminent return of the Lord. The word imminent means **Imminent = "Appearing as if about to happen; likely to happen without delay; impending."** We mentioned the fact that the disciples and the first century believers were expecting the Lord to return in their lifetime. The signs they saw caused them to believe his return was likely to happen without delay, that it was impending. Today, we are 2,000 years closer to that event, 2,000 years closer to the Lord's imminent return.

Last Sunday we quoted from the passage in 2 Peter 3, where the Apostle Peter asks the question, in light of the coming judgment and of the Lord's soon return, **"What kind of people ought you to be?"** His answer was, **"You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."** **2 Peter 3:11-12** The imminent return of the Lord is a motivating factor in how we live our life. Knowing the Lord is coming and that he may come today motivates us to live in a way that's pleasing to Him. It moves us as Peter said to live a holy and godly life because we are expecting his return any time.

Last Sunday we looked at the first of five ways the imminent return of the Lord influences us. We said, **The hope of our Lord's imminent return provides a powerful incentive for right living in our daily life.** Today I want us to look at this second truth. **The Lord's imminent return motivates us to risk greatly for the King and His Kingdom.**

The Lord's return is imminent. We've been saying it for 2,000 years, but as we've said, we know it's still true. So what does that mean for us today, in 2021? The Lord's imminent return puts life in perspective. Jesus is coming and some things just aren't as important in the face of eternity. Priorities change in the light of his imminent return. Sacrifices seem less severe in light of his coming. Referring to all the persecution and suffering he had experienced for the cause of Christ, the Apostle Paul wrote, **"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."** **2 Corinthians 4:17** Paul viewed it all as nothing in the light of Jesus' return and the hope of heaven. Risk and sacrifice for the King and His Kingdom can't compare to what awaits us at the end of this journey.

Priorities change. I'm not talking about making foolish choices. I'm sure there were believers in the first century church that argued, "You shouldn't get married because Jesus may come today. There is no time for marriage or family. You just need to be telling others about

Jesus.” They were right about the urgency of telling others about Jesus while there was time, but if all the believers in the first century had stopped marrying and having children, where would the next generation be? The Lord is coming, but don’t stop marrying or having children, or working, or investing or preparing for retirement. In one of his parables in Luke 19:13 Jesus said, “Occupy until I come.” Keep working, serving, remain engaged in life until he returns. But the perspective and priority changes. We work and invest in light of his imminent return, not working simply for ourselves but for others, for the gospel, for Jesus. Living in light of his imminent return affects where, how and in what we invest our money, our time, our talent and our efforts. To some extent, everything is viewed in the context of the Lord’s soon return. It changes our perspective and re-orders our priorities. Building a fortune on earth but not using our resources for the Lord and to win others to Christ, that’s not living in light of his return. Jesus said **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Matthew 6:19-20.** Treasures in heaven include those who have come to know the Lord through your witness, through your efforts, your talent, your giving, your investment.

His imminent return should keep us from becoming distracted. All the issues that are driving the conversation in the USA right now, I’m not saying some of those issues aren’t vitally important, I’m not trying to discount anyone’s efforts for a good cause, we need godly politicians and activists, but as a matter of perspective and priority, in light of the Lord’s imminent return, I must tell you thirty seconds after the trumpet sounds, people won’t be thinking “I should have worked harder to get people to vote for my candidate, or worked harder to persuade people about masks or vaccines or anything else.” Instead, we’ll be saying “why didn’t I bring more people to Jesus?” Two minutes into eternity will change a lot of people’s priorities and perspectives. Why not allow the Lord’s imminent return to re-order your perspective and priorities right now? **Jesus is coming! What occupies your time, your attention, your resources?** Don’t get distracted from what really matters!

Belief in Jesus’ imminent return motivated the early church to risk greatly for the King and his Kingdom. The word martyr comes from the Greek word for witness and was first applied to those who were witnesses for Christ, those choosing rather to die than renounce their

faith. **Jesus is coming! What are you willing to risk? What are you so passionate about that you will make any level of sacrifice? For what are you willing to die?**

I'm talking about giving your life for the sake and cause of Christ. I'm talking about weighing the facts, that Jesus is coming soon, that people are perishing every day that haven't heard about Jesus or that don't know Him as their Savior. People are dying without God, headed to hell for eternity. The call is for us to live holy and godly lives and to go into every person's world and share the gospel and make disciples as long as there is time. So what am I willing to sacrifice, lay aside, risk, give up, for the sake of Jesus, to obey his will, to share his good news? Am I willing to risk fortune, fame, reputation, even my life in order to be obedient to the Lord and to do his will and his work?

Someday Jesus is going to return and we will stand before him and he will ask, "what did you do with the gifts, talent and resources I blessed you with?" What accounting will we give? What did we risk for the cause of Christ? Again, I'm not talking about taking a vow of poverty or taking foolish risks. I'm asking in light of the Lord's imminent return, what are you willing to risk for the sake of the gospel? There is an urgency about it all. Every generation must recognize the urgency, the lateness of the hour. Once again, even if Jesus tarries his return, around the world, 114 people die every minute. Almost 2 people per second, 164,000 people a day die, far too many without Jesus. Living in light of his imminent return, knowing time is slipping away for so many, it should motivate us to risk greatly for the King and His kingdom! Let me share a couple of stories.

Jim Elliott was one of five missionaries killed by a primitive tribe in the jungles of Ecuador in 1956. Jim was 28 years old. Eight years before he died he wrote, "**God, I pray, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus.**" The next year in his journal he wrote, "**He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**"...**Jim Elliot** (You can read his incredible story in the book, *Shadow of the Almighty* written by his widow, Elisabeth Elliot). He was willing to risk it all for the sake of the gospel, to take Jesus to people who had no hope, who had never heard. It cost him his life, but through his sacrifice the Haurani people of Ecuador came to know Jesus. The man who killed Jim Elliott himself was born again through Jim's willing sacrifice. The imminent return of the Lord should motivate us to risk, to go, to stay, to sacrifice, for the cause of Christ.

I've told you stories of my Aunt **Cledith Cox** who was a missionary to Africa. I have handwritten notes and prayers, written in the spring of 1940 where Cledith was crying out to the Lord, anxious to get to Africa. **“In your time, surely you will open up the way for me to go forth to the land to which you have called me. My heart is so heavy today Jesus, because of the great need there...”** There was an urgency that kept driving her. People were dying without Jesus. It was four years later before she was able to finally arrive in Nigeria. When the Lord called her, he gave her a vision of an elderly African man. Before the end of her first term, she was asked to visit and pray for the oldest man in a certain village. In a dark hut, the old man turned toward her and Cledith recognized him, the man in her vision. She prayed with him and God saved him and healed him. Two weeks before she returned to the states, she saw him again. “You’re not the same man.” “I am the same man on the outside, but a different man on the inside.” He took her hand and said, “Thank you God for sending this person so far to give us so much, to give us hope.” She got there in time for that man. There is an urgency. Jesus is coming. Are you willing to sacrifice? Willing to go? (A single woman in war time, crossing an ocean by ship to tell that man and countless others about Jesus!)

Cledith's co-worker her first term was a lady named **Betty Hall**. While on the field, Betty met and married a missionary named Elmer Frink. They had a son named Verl Dean. After four years Cledith returned home on furlough, but Betty stayed behind with her husband and infant son. While ministering in Nigeria she contracted Black Water Fever. Cledith happened to be at my parent's home in Sapulpa when a Western Union Cable arrived from Springfield. **“Cable just received from Elmer states Betty with Jesus Blackwater Fever. Perkin.** (Noel Perkin was the head of the Foreign Missions Department.) A letter arrived later that month from Elmer dated the day Betty died, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1948. He said her only regret was that she might have failed in some way, perhaps she hadn't done everything she could.

What makes a young woman, a young wife and mother go to and stay in a difficult and dangerous place, to even be willing to suffer and die? I can give you part of the reason: The knowledge of Christ's imminent return. Knowing that people are waiting without hope, without Christ, like the old African man in the hut that Cledith prayed for, and they will die without Jesus unless someone tells them. Jesus is coming. The hour is later than it's ever been. Who will tell them while there is still time?

I was just a boy when we heard the news about missionary **J. W. Tucker**. He and his wife, Angeline and their children had served as missionaries to the Congo since 1939 (now Zaire or Democratic Republic of Congo). They had been in the states on furlough but returned to the Congo in August of 1964. When asked if he was concerned about returning because of the civil war happening in Congo, Jay was reported to have said, "God never told me I had to come out. He only told me I had to go in." His wife said after praying Jay said, "I must go back. The Lord is calling me back and we must trust in Him." Less than two weeks after arriving back in the Congo the family was placed under house arrest by rebel forces. J W and the oldest son John were arrested, interrogated and released a couple of times. Finally, Nov. 4, the day before J W's 49<sup>th</sup> birthday, he was arrested by rebels along with 35 others and held in a Catholic mission. November 25<sup>th</sup>, the day before thanksgiving of 1964, the rebels took JW and 12 other prisoners, beat them to death and threw their bodies into the crocodile infested waters of the Bomokande River. When Angeline called the mission to ask about JW, the Mother Superior told her, "He is in heaven." Two days after his death, a combined Belgian and American rescue operation brought the Tucker family and their co-workers to safety. His widow continued to work tirelessly to ensure that her loss would be Congo's gain. She said, "If Jesus tarries, there should be a wonderful harvest of souls in all of northeast Congo: for we truly believe that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." It turns out, she was correct.

The Bomokande river follows through an area occupied by the Mangbetu tribe. They had long been resistant to the gospel. One of JW Tucker's converts became the police chief in a town in the heart of this area. Given the opportunity, he reminded the people of a Mangbetu tradition that said "If the blood of any man flows in the Bomokande River, you must listen to his message." The police chief told the people, "Some time ago a man was killed and his body was thrown into your Bomokande River. The crocodiles in this river ate him up. His blood flowed in your river, but before he died, he left me a message. This message concerns God's son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to this world to save people who were sinners. He died for the sins of the world; he died for my sins. I received this message and it changed my life. Now, if this man were here today, he would tell you this same message. He's not here, but his message is the same." At the end of his message, people began to fall on their knees and cry out to the Lord. As a result of JW Tucker's martyrdom, a great revival swept through the region with thousands receiving Christ, hundreds experienced healing. In 1964, the Assemblies of God reported 4,710

adult believers in the Congo. Fifty years later, in 2014, they reported more than half a million adherents. Part of that growth is due to the sacrifice of J W Tucker. He was willing to risk everything for the cause of Christ.

Jesus is coming. His return is imminent. People are waiting in hopelessness to hear about Jesus, what are you willing to risk to see that everyone hears? George Wood said, **“If we live without perspective on eternity or the coming of the Lord, we will base our decisions on what’s good for right now. Every time, we will choose comfort over danger, self-fulfillment over self-denial, and escaping rather than bearing our cross...Are we taking the kind of risks which produce eternal dividends?”...George O. Wood**

What are you willing to risk for the cause of Christ? As a church, what are we willing to sacrifice, to risk in order to spread the gospel, to reach those who don’t know Jesus? Is there something the Lord prompted you to do that you’ve stepped back from doing because you thought the cost too great? Are you willing to sacrifice comfort for his sake? Are you daring much for the King and His Kingdom? Jesus is coming. Whatever you risk or sacrifice, it will be worth it all at the Lord’s return.

Eliezer Ben Yehudah was the man responsible for resurrecting an ancient and dead language and creating the modern Hebrew language. No one had ever done it before. Driven by what he saw as the importance and the urgency of his work he said, **“The day is so short, the work to be done so great!” ...Eliezer Ben Yehudah**

His work was nothing compared to ours for our work is about eternity. The Lord’s imminent return should motivate us to risk greatly for the King and His Kingdom. Are you willing to risk, to sacrifice, to obey, regardless of the cost? The day is so short, the work to be done so great. The cost may be great, but I assure you, the dividends are greater!