

Week of Sept 23-29

BLESSED HOPE

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Thessalonians chapter 4

According to some scholars, there are over 1,800 references to the second coming of Christ found in Scripture. More than 300 of these are found in the New Testament. Seventy percent of the chapters found in the New Testament contain a reference to Christ's return. Each of Paul's letters refers to the return of Christ. Every chapter of 1 Thessalonians concludes with a reference to his coming. For this reason, we're going to focus on this key doctrine of the church in this devotional and the next.

In Titus 2:13, Paul refers to Christ's return as the church's blessed hope. His coming, though, was not just a future event to look forward to but had present implications for the Christian's life in the here and now. It is our hope in Christ's return that motivates us to serve faithfully and to persevere joyfully in spite of difficulties along the way. We know that our service is not in vain. We recognize that trails will not last forever. We acknowledge that rulers and authorities both heavenly and earthly who now rail against God and his Son, Jesus, will ultimately fail and will have to bow the knee in submission. We know who wins and, therefore, we can serve without fear of the future.

In addition, it is our hope in Christ's return that serves as an encouragement to holy living. As Paul notes both in the Titus passage above as well as in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and 5:23-24, we are to live holy and blameless lives in light of Christ's return. Both the apostle Peter and the apostle John stress the same points in their epistles (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-12; 1 John 3:1-2). We know that Christ's return means that eternal values really do matter and living in light of those values is the expectation the Lord has for us. We also know we'll be held accountable for how we're living since we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ at his return (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Christ's return is also a great encourager. Our loved ones who have died in the Lord are not gone forever. Funerals and committal services are only temporary goodbyes for believers that have gone before. *"Brothers, we do not want to you be ignorant about those who fall asleep or to grieve like the rest of men, who have not hope...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."* We have great hope that death doesn't have the final word: Jesus does! His return will reunite us with our believing loved ones and we will be with him forever. Talk about a blessed hope!

Action Step: Read the last few verses of each chapter of 1 Thessalonians and look for the references to Christ's return. How often do you reflect on the truth that Jesus is coming back? How does the promise of his return affect your day to day life?

Prayer Focus: For the return of Christ to act as a motivator for your service to the Lord, your faithful perseverance in faith through trials, and a righteous lifestyle.

Take-a-way: *The Lord's return is not just a future event. It has present implications.*