

SESSION 7

The Church That Forgot Its Hope

Summary and Goal

From 1 Thessalonians, we see the importance of living with Christian hope—a hope that looks forward to the resurrection, Christ’s return, and the final judgment. When Jesus returns, He will raise His people from the dead and judge the wicked. This future gives us hope to endure whatever comes our way today and also the grounds to encourage one another for faithful living.

Main Passage

1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

Session Outline

1. Christian hope looks forward to the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-14).
2. Christian hope looks forward to Christ’s return (1 Thess. 4:15-18).
3. Christian hope looks forward to final judgment (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

Theological Theme

Christ will return to this earth and raise His people from the dead.

Christ Connection

The Old Testament prophets continually spoke of the Day of the Lord—when God would return to judge the world and save His people. Paul spoke of a future Day of the Lord when Jesus would return, raise His people from the dead, and judge the wicked. Christians live in light of Christ’s second coming.

Missional Application

God calls us to encourage one another with words of hope.

Session Plan

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Session 7

Pack Item 1: Come, Lord Jesus

Display this poster in a place that will help group members follow the progression of sessions through this volume.

Ask group members to look at the titles for Unit 2 and to pick one they are looking forward to studying. If time permits, allow them a brief moment to explain their choices.

? For Further Discussion

What might it look like to grieve death as one without hope?

What might it look like to grieve death as one with hope in Christ?

Introduction

Assess why people are captivated by survival stories. Establish that hope is the key to surviving difficult situations (leader p. 82; PSG p. 65).

- ? How has hope sustained you through difficult situations, or what are you going through now that requires hope?

Summarize this session on living with Christian hope as spoken of in 1 Thessalonians (leader p. 82; PSG p. 65).

1. Christian hope looks forward to the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

Set the context of the passage, and then read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. Share why resurrection hope for the dead in Christ is a practical concern—it provides motivation for living today (leader p. 83; PSG p. 66).

- ? How does hope in the resurrection address the difficulties you struggle with in living for Christ?

Note that while Paul called on the Thessalonians to find hope in the future resurrection of the dead, he didn't minimize the darkness of grief. Christians grieve over death, just not as the world grieves because of the resurrection of Jesus (leader p. 84; PSG p. 67).

- ? In what ways have you comforted others during loss, or been comforted yourself, that has been helpful?

2. Christian hope looks forward to Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. Explain Paul's encouragement regarding believers who are still alive when Jesus returns. The dead will be raised first, then those who are alive will join them so that all believers will be with Jesus (leader p. 85; PSG p. 68).

- What thoughts and emotions does Paul's teaching on both the dead and living in Christ being with Him at His return elicit in you?

Present the two other details that Paul adds to increase our understanding of Christ's return: 1) the Lord will come with a shout, the archangel's voice, and the trumpet of God, and 2) when Jesus returns, we will be raised with Him forever (leader pp. 85-86; PSG pp. 68-69).

- How should Jesus' return deepen our love for Him and others?
- The return of Jesus will be good news for those who believe in Him but frightful news for unbelievers. How should Jesus' return impact our understanding and practice of evangelism?

3. Christian hope looks forward to final judgment (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. Clarify how Jesus' return compares to the coming of a thief in the night. State that the point of this comparison is we need to be awake and ready for His coming (leader pp. 87-88; PSG p. 70).

- What are some ways we can better steward the resources God has given us, such as time and possessions, in light of Christ's return?

Talk about the Day of the Lord and its significance tied to the Old Testament. Address why we should look forward to Jesus' final judgment over Satan, sin, and death (leader pp. 88-89; PSG p. 71).

- How does the coming judgment of Satan, sin, and death strengthen us to live faithfully for Christ today?
- In what areas of your life is God sanctifying and purifying you as part of the bride of Christ?

Conclusion

Close by reiterating the hope that Christ will return for us—whether we are dead or alive on that day—and He will judge the world (leader p. 89; PSG p. 72). *Apply the truths of this session with "His Mission, Your Mission"* (PSG p. 73).

Pack Item 8: Stand Steadfast

Calling attention to the Tertullian quote on this poster, ask the following questions:

- In terms of Paul's exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, what would it look like for us to "stand steadfast"?
- What should "children of light" expect for their stand in the darkness? How can we prepare ourselves to stand steadfast?

Conclusion Option

Consider closing this group meeting by singing together the hymn "Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It."

(Available as **Pack Item 9: Hymn Handout** in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*. Make as many copies as needed.)

Christ Connection: The Old Testament prophets continually spoke of the Day of the Lord—when God would return to judge the world and save His people. Paul spoke of a future Day of the Lord when Jesus would return, raise His people from the dead, and judge the wicked. Christians live in light of Christ's second coming.

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Missional Application: God calls us to encourage one another with words of hope.

Expanded Session Content

The Church That Forgot Its Hope

Session 7



Voices from Church History

“There is no love without hope, no hope without love, and neither love nor hope without faith.”³

—Augustine (354-430)

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

97. Millennial Views

There are three predominant views regarding how to understand the Bible’s teaching on the millennial reign of Christ. The premillennial view holds that the millennium is a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth that will take place just after the return of Christ. The postmillennial view holds that the millennium happens during this church age, and the return of Christ will take place afterward. The amillennial view holds that there is no literal millennial reign of Christ here on earth, but instead, it symbolically represents Christ’s reign in the hearts of God’s people during the church age.

Introduction

Many of us are captivated by stories of survival, stories such as Ernest Shackleton’s Antarctic expedition of 1914-1916. In January 1915, while on the way to Antarctica, the crew’s ship, the *Endurance*, became frozen in an ice flow. Hope that the ship would eventually break free of the ice and sail onward ended when the hull was crushed and the ship sank. The crew set up camp on the ice and drifted until the ice sheet began to break apart in April 1916. They then set off in lifeboats and reached Elephant Island where Shackleton left them and took five others to find help. The six spent sixteen days crossing thirteen-hundred kilometers of open ocean before reaching a whaling station on the island of South Georgia. The rest of the crew was rescued in August 1916 without a single man perishing.¹

When we read stories such as Shackleton’s, we wonder and marvel at how they survived. What was it that enabled them to endure when so many others would not have? Perhaps Admiral Stockdale answered this question best when he explained the key to his surviving an eight-year imprisonment in one of Vietnam’s POW camps: the mixture of unwavering hope he would survive and the ability to confront the brutal facts of his situation.² Never losing hope is key to survival. Hope sustains life even in the most difficult of situations, while losing hope hastens death. That is the power of hope, or the lack of it.



How has hope sustained you through difficult situations, or what are you going through now that requires hope?

Session Summary

As we examine a few of the New Testament epistles before reaching the Book of Revelation, we will learn how we are to live today in light of our future. First up in this session from 1 Thessalonians, we will see the importance of living with Christian hope—a hope that looks forward to the resurrection, Christ’s return, and the final judgment. When Jesus returns, He will raise His people from the dead and judge the wicked. This future gives us hope to endure whatever comes our way today and also the grounds to encourage one another for faithful living.

1. Christian hope looks forward to the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

As chapter 4 opens, Paul implores the Thessalonian Christians to be holy and pure, to love one another, and to lead quiet lives, minding their own business and working with their hands. Paul wanted the church to understand their need to live in community with one another.

Perhaps he knew they were getting weary. They certainly faced enemy forces and deadly situations as they were persecuted for their belief in Jesus as Messiah (1 Thess. 1:6). Perhaps they had become confused about some pillars of their faith. Most certainly they had questions. Had the Messiah already come again? Had they missed His return? If He had not, what would happen to their deceased loved ones if He returned tomorrow? Would they miss the glorious hope for which they lived, suffered, and died? Paul, with pastoral care, turned his attention to their grief.

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Paul said twice that what he shared in the previous twelve verses of this chapter was known by the Thessalonians (4:2,9). He wrote to remind them of what they already knew. But in verse 13, Paul shifts to share something the church may not have known—resurrection hope for the dead in Christ. For Paul, this was not merely a theological issue; it was intensely practical. The Thessalonians' questions, concerns, and misunderstandings about what happens to dead believers would have ripple effects into how they lived, if it hadn't already. If there is no hope in death for the believer, why does it matter how we live today? Why live holy and pure and sacrifice the pleasures of the world for no apparent benefit?

Many of us ask similar questions today. We might look at our culture and see unbelievers prospering and wonder if living for Christ is worth it. We don't want to abandon Christ, but we wonder if we need to be extreme in how we live.

To answer these questions, Paul pushed the Thessalonians, and us, to look to the end of the story. Yes, living for Christ can be costly today. Yes, it can be difficult and even painful. But when we look to the end of the story—that all believers, living and dead, will be resurrected—we find motivation for living today. Christian hope provides the courage we need to live out our faith and empowers us to endure and persevere. As Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthian church, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19). But our hope *is* for more than this present time. Our hope is in our King returning for us. We will make it!

Further Commentary

"The great confession of faith in 4:14...asserts that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are undeniable historical realities. These realities, and what God accomplished in them, guarantee our own future resurrection and the resurrection of those who have died before Christ returns. After his resurrection, Jesus was exalted to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father. But he has promised that he will return (Acts 1:9-11). When the time comes and the trumpet sounds to signal that triumphant return, the dead in Christ will be the first to experience it as they will rise first and then those 'who are still alive and left will be caught up together with them' to meet the Lord (4:15-17). All Christians, living and dead, will share the same destiny as they rejoice in the presence of the Lord."⁴

—Rosalie Koudougeret

Voices from Church History

"Let us, my brethren, with regard to those who have left us in the Lord, let us, with regard to ourselves and our own future, be ever looking for and hasting to that day of God; the day when that better thing which God hath provided for us shall be manifested, and they with us shall be complete, who without us were not perfect."⁵

—Henry Alford (1810-1871)

Further Commentary

“We cannot overlook the significance of Paul’s use of the word *sleep* to describe death. There is a reason the biblical authors, including Jesus, describe believers who die as being asleep (Matt. 9:24; 27:52; Mark 5:39; John 11:11-14; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:6,18,20,51). Sleep is never final; it is always temporary. Paul uses the word *sleep* to refer specifically to the physical body. When believers die, their bodies sleep. Paul is not referring to ‘soul sleep.’ The concept of soul sleep is completely foreign to Scripture. On the contrary, the Bible explicitly affirms the eternal consciousness of every person. In other words, there will never be a time when a person ceases to exist or ceases to be conscious of his existence. This is true for both the believer and the non-believer. For example, when Christians die their bodies go into the grave but their spirits go directly into the presence of God (2 Cor 5:8). By contrast, when non-Christians die their bodies go into the grave but their spirits go immediately to hell (Luke 16:22-23)...Hence, at death your existence does not end. Your physical body goes to sleep, but your spirit continues to exist.”⁶

—Mark Howell



How does hope in the resurrection address the difficulties you struggle with in living for Christ?

Admiral Stockdale was not the first to share the survival formula of hope mixed with reality—Paul beat him to it by nearly two millennia. While Paul called on the Thessalonians to find hope in the future resurrection of the dead, he didn’t minimize the darkness of grief. The pain of losing a loved one, even a loved one in Christ, is real and should not be overlooked. The Christian should not look upon death with cold stoicism but should grieve death, reflecting the value of the gift God had given in that person’s life. Not to grieve is not to care. To grieve is to feel the loss, even if temporary, and to yearn for the day when death will be no more and God will reunite all of His people to Himself and one another.

So Christians are to grieve; it is right and fitting that we do, but we do not grieve as the world grieves. We grieve differently, knowing death is not final. Believers grieve with hope that looks forward to the resurrection. It is hope in spite of the darkness, a concept familiar to Paul based on his knowledge and faith in Scripture.

- Paul understood the faith empowering Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac believing Isaac would live again (Heb. 11:19).
- Paul knew Job’s affirmative answer (Job 19:25-26) to his own question, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (14:14).
- Paul understood the death, burial, and resurrection of Messiah as prophesied in Psalm 16.

Just as Abraham trusted God to resurrect Isaac and fulfill His promise, believers can trust Jesus to do the same for us. For the believer, one day it will be said in reality that death has been swallowed up in victory and its sting is gone (1 Cor. 15:54-55). With the assurance of this victory, Christian hope allows mourning and hopeful anticipation to coexist.

Paul’s support for such encouragement to the church rests in the resurrection of Jesus. The transition between verses 13 and 14 is the word “for,” denoting purpose. What Paul states in verse 13 is true because of what he states in verse 14. We grieve with hope because we believe Jesus died and rose again. Christ’s resurrection guarantees ours.



In what ways have you comforted others during loss, or been comforted yourself, that has been helpful?


2. Christian hope looks forward to Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Having mentioned the second coming of Jesus in the previous verse (4:14), the fourth time in the letter (see also 1:10; 2:19; 3:13), Paul now explores this event in more depth. But first he wanted to make clear the source of what he was about to share about Jesus' return. What Paul was about to describe in detail came "by a word from the Lord." We cannot be sure which of Jesus' teachings informed these verses, but it was important for the Thessalonians, and us, to understand that the truth of Jesus' return—the source of our hope—is anchored in Christ Himself and is thus secure. Christian hope is not misplaced. Its strength comes from its source—Jesus. Because of this, our hope will not disappoint.

Paul may have anticipated the Thessalonians responding to what he wrote in verses 13-14 with a question: "Well, that sounds great for those who are dead in Christ, but what about the living? What will happen to us if we are still alive when Jesus returns?" Earlier Paul was concerned about the Thessalonians not understanding what is in store for their dead loved ones; now he turns his attention to those who are still alive.

Paul makes it clear that believers who are alive when the Lord returns will not be denied anything experienced by those who are asleep. The dead in Christ will not enjoy an extended private reception with Jesus apart from believers who are alive. The dead will be raised first, but those who are alive "will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" And at that point, all believers—living and dead—will be where they belong, with Jesus.

 What thoughts and emotions does Paul's teaching on both the dead and living in Christ being with Him at His return elicit in you?

While the truth of the dead and living in Christ being caught up with Him at His return is ample reason to hope, Paul adds two other details to increase our understanding and to heighten our anticipation of this event.

Further Commentary

"There are many people who claim to be able to tell us when the Lord will return or exactly what will happen at that time. We should be very cautious about accepting any such claims. They may be popular, but they are often based on unbalanced interpretation of biblical texts. All that we can be sure of is that the Lord will return. This belief is what the early church proclaimed in the Apostles' Creed: 'He [the Lord Jesus] shall come again to judge the living and the dead.' Christians can thus await a cosmic event that will include the personal, visible appearing of the Lord Jesus and the gathering up of all his people, whether dead or alive. Beyond this, we would be wise to admit that we cannot be sure about the full realities behind the imagery used in passages like this one."⁷

—Jacob Cherian

Voices from Church History

"I believe that in the end the truth will conquer."⁸

—John Wycliffe
(circa 1320-1384)

Further Commentary

“Some critics claim that Paul believed he would live to see Christ’s return but didn’t and that therefore either Paul wasn’t inspired or the Bible contains false statements. But while Paul’s use of ‘we’ may imply that he expected to be alive, it does not require or prove that he believed this. At 1 Corinthians 15:52-53, Paul expressed virtually the same idea as he did here, yet in the same letter he wrote, ‘God... will also raise us up by His power’ (1 Cor. 6:14). So he apparently considered both options to be possible for him (cp. 1 Thess. 5:10, ‘whether we are awake or asleep’). In 5:1-2, Paul implied the same thing that Jesus said about not knowing the time of Christ’s return (see Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:6-7). It would be odd for Paul to contradict himself within a few short verses.”⁹

—Michael W. Holmes

Voices from the Church

“The end will come with the return of Jesus Christ... That is why a Christian can be an optimist. That is why a Christian can smile in the midst of all that is happening...We know what the end will be: the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ!”¹⁰

—Billy Graham

First, he describes how the Lord will come with a shout, the archangel’s voice, and the trumpet of God. This is similar to John’s language used in the Book of Revelation, especially in chapter 10. While Christians hold different interpretations about how the last days will play out (see the 99 Essential Christian Doctrine “Millennial Views” [leader p. 82]), we all hold to the truth that one day Jesus will return in glory, bring an end to all that is opposed to Him, and reward His own. This will be a day of great victory for believers, a time of celebration! As we look toward that day, whether we are dead or alive when it occurs, we should be ready to endure pain and suffering, persevere through tribulation, and stand in the face of rejection since the second coming will reveal our conquering King.

Second, Paul clarifies that when Jesus returns, we will be raised with Him not just in that moment but forever. “We will always be with the Lord” in His presence from that day forward throughout eternity. We experience God’s ongoing presence in our lives now, but on that day, we will experience Him in a fuller, more beautiful way.

Our salvation is not just salvation *from* sin; it is also salvation *to* relationship with Christ. Our hope does not merely anticipate victory over sin and death but also the reward of the presence of Christ. *He* is our reward. We endure and live faithfully for Christ today knowing that one day we will be with Him and hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

This day—the Day of the Lord—is coming. Jesus will return as King, stand on the Mount of Olives, and split the east from the west (Zech. 14:4,9). Paul encourages the church to be steadfast in righteous living and hope because of the Savior’s return, but he adds one more layer of instruction in verse 18. Just as he was encouraging the Thessalonians with words about the return of Jesus, they too should encourage one another with the same message. The same love and care Paul felt for the Thessalonians should be expressed between them, echoing back to his instruction about brotherly love in verse 9. We are loved by Christ, and as a result, we love Him *and* one another. This love is an expression of our hope in action.

- ❓ How should Jesus’ return deepen our love for Him and others?
- ❓ The return of Jesus will be good news for those who believe in Him but frightful news for unbelievers. How should Jesus’ return impact our understanding and practice of evangelism?

3. Christian hope looks forward to final judgment (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Have you ever had a teacher who encouraged you while you struggled to learn a difficult subject? Teachers like this are wonderful at making their students feel good about their ability to grasp difficult concepts, even if it sounded like they were speaking a foreign language just moments before. These teachers make their students believe they can do it, and most students will do whatever they can to prove them right.

This is what we see from Paul here. Paul knows that he has waded out from the shallower waters of the faith and into deeper doctrinal waters for the Thessalonians. They were struggling to understand what will happen to the dead in Christ and what Jesus' return would entail. But now, as Paul turns the corner to address what will happen to unbelievers on that day, he pauses to encourage them by what they *do* know—"the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

When Paul says that Jesus will return like a thief in the night, he is not impugning Jesus' character. The comparison is not Jesus with a thief but Jesus' return with a thief's arrival. Both are unexpected and happen without warning. Just as we would not expect a thief to tell when he planned to rob a home, neither should we expect to know when Jesus will return. His return will be sudden, so sudden that the world will proclaim peace and security the instant before destruction comes.

Further Commentary

"The Greek word for 'sleep' in [5:6-7] (see also v. 10) is different than that in 4:13-15. In 5:6-7, 'sleep' refers to moral lethargy. Some interpreters take 'sleep' in v. 10 as a euphemism for death, but a good case can be made that the same Greek word in this context refers to moral lethargy as well. Thus Paul is saying in v. 10 that whether believers are alert or not for the day of the Lord, we will still 'live together' with the Lord."¹¹

—James F. Davis

Further Commentary

"The phrase 'day of the Lord' is common in the OT Prophets...It refers to the great and terrible day when Yahweh will intervene to punish the disobedient (e.g., Isa. 13:6-16; Joel 1:13-15; 2:1-11; Obad. 15-20; Mal. 4:5) and to save the faithful (e.g., Isa. 27:2-13; Jer. 30:8-9; Joel 2:31-32; Obad. 21). In Paul's letters it is equated with the second coming...Throughout the NT, the thief simile suggests unexpectedness and unwelcomeness (Matt. 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15)...'labor pains.' An analogy referring to the judgment and destruction on the day of the Lord (cf. Isa. 13:8; Jer. 6:24)."¹²

—Colin Nicholl



Voices from Church History

“Just as there are no ultimate tragedies for the believer, so for the impenitent unbeliever there are no ultimate blessings. Every good gift God bestows upon the wicked, for which the wicked do not glorify God or acknowledge His goodness with gratitude and worship, becomes a tragedy. The more gifts God gives that are despised by the recipient, the more guilt is incurred, so that, to the wicked, on Judgment Day the gifts of God’s kindness become tragedies.”¹³

—R. C. Sproul



Voices from Church History

“He who bids us shine as sons of light, does not bid us hide away out of sight as sons of darkness. He commands us to stand steadfast.”¹⁴

—Tertullian (circa 160-225)

Jesus told a parable of ten virgins waiting for a groom’s arrival to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven will be like (Matt. 25:1-13). Five of the virgins were wise and had brought oil for their lamps with them, but the other five were foolish and did not. The groom was delayed, and the virgins all fell asleep. When the groom finally arrived, the foolish virgins ran to purchase oil for their lamps and missed his arrival and entrance into the wedding banquet. Jesus concluded the parable with this instruction: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13).

For those of us in Christ, the message from Jesus in this parable and Paul in 1 Thessalonians is that we need to “keep awake and be sober.” While our hope looks forward to Jesus’ return, it also serves as motivation to live faithfully today. We don’t want to be caught off guard when Christ returns and be discovered living foolishly. At the same time, we don’t want to fall asleep and fail to fulfill the mission He has given us—to share the gospel with the unbelieving world while there is still time for them to repent and experience God’s grace and mercy. Not knowing when Jesus will return doesn’t mean we cannot be ready; it should motivate us to live in a constant state of readiness.



What are some ways we can better steward the resources God has given us, such as time and possessions, in light of Christ’s return?

The Day of the Lord will not just be a day of victory for God’s people, but it will also be a sobering day of judgment for all those who reject Him (see Isa. 13:9-11; Zeph. 1:14-16). God, by His grace, provides rescue from judgment, but only to those who trust in Him.

We see this clearly in the account of Noah in Genesis 6–9. While Noah trusted God and built the ark, his neighbors ignored the warnings as he prepared for rain. They married, partied, and enjoyed life until the rains came. Ultimately, though Noah loved his neighbors and tried to warn them, Noah and his family alone were saved in the ark while the unbelievers perished in the waters of God’s judgment (Matt. 24:37-39).

As the Day of the Lord approaches, unbelievers still enjoy life without planning for or considering eternity in light of God’s Word. They did this in Noah’s day, in Paul’s day, in our day, and they will continue to do so until Christ returns. But we know judgment is coming.

While we should not delight in any person spending eternity outside of relationship with Christ, we can and should look forward to final judgment over Satan, sin, and death. When Jesus returns, all rebellion against Him will end. Sin and death will be no more. And Satan, the serpent of old, will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity. And on this day, everything that was once right will be made right once more for God’s glory.

Christians face judgment with hopeful anticipation because we know whose we are, we know our sin has been forgiven, we know Satan has been defeated, and we know Christ will reign forever. We remember and rehearse God's story, including its end, and comfort one another with its words.

Presently the church is in a state of needing sanctification from her stains, wrinkles, and blemishes. However, when Christ returns, the church will be transformed into a state of glorification. John puts it this way: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). At the marriage supper of the Lamb, the church, the bride of Christ, will be dressed in white reflecting perfection. At this great coronation, the church will celebrate her husband, the Lord Jesus Christ who has perfected her.

Today the church sings in anticipation of *that day* when we sing: "Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; Redeemed through His infinite mercy, His child, and forever, I am."¹⁵

- ❓ How does the coming judgment of Satan, sin, and death strengthen us to live faithfully for Christ today?
- ❓ In what areas of your life is God sanctifying and purifying you as part of the bride of Christ?

Conclusion

Christian hope gives us a lens of faith through which we can better view and understand the world around us—a world plagued by sin, decay, death, and pain. With this lens, we look forward, beyond what we experience today, to a world unbelievers cannot see—a world transformed by Christ upon His return where He reigns in glory and He has made everything new. Seeing this in our future is what provides us with the encouragement we need to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). Christ is returning for us—whether we are dead or alive on that day—and He is judging the world as we know it. This is the hope we need.

But not forever. One day, we will cast aside this hope, not because it is unfilled but because it *has been* fulfilled. In the eternal state, we will no longer walk by hope because hope is only needed for that which is real but unseen (Rom. 8:24-25). One day we will no longer have to hope because what is presently unseen will be seen, when our Savior returns for us.

CHRIST CONNECTION: The Old Testament prophets continually spoke of the Day of the Lord—when God would return to judge the world and save His people. Paul spoke of a future Day of the Lord when Jesus would return, raise His people from the dead, and judge the wicked. Christians live in light of Christ's second coming.

Voices from Church History

"O miserable, unthankful, and most mischievous world! what shall be thy condemnation, when He that has so often gently provoked you to obey His truth, shall come in His glory, to punish thy contempt!...Our heavenly Father, of His infinite wisdom, to hold us in continual remembrance that in this wretched world there is no rest, suffereth us to be tried with this cross, that with an unfeigned heart we may desire not only an end of our own troubles (for that shall come to us by death), but also of all the troubles of the Church of God; which shall not be before the again-coming of the Lord Jesus"¹⁶

—John Knox
(circa 1514-1572)

Voices from Church History

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness."¹⁷

—Edward Mote (1797-1874)

Additional Resources

The Church That Forgot Its Hope

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Study Material

- "The Radical Cross: Its Provision"—Chapter 7 from *The Radical Cross* by A.W. Tozer
- "Life and Hope in a World of Loss"—Article by David Powlison; find a link to this article at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Angels as Heralds of God," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Sermon

Alistair Begg: "Christians Grieve Too"

Find a link to this at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

Tip of the Week

Prepare People for the Pain

"Prepare people for pain by teaching the truth of living in a fallen world ravaged with the effects of sin, the hope of the future when everything is made right, and the reality that God lovingly uses pain to purify and mature His people. Remind people that God is ultimately in control of everything, that He does whatever He pleases, and that this life is brief and temporary. Grab the hearts of the people you serve with the great news of heaven where every sorrow will be reversed and all the implications of a fallen world will be gone forever."¹⁸

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