



DOCTRINE IN THE REAL WORLD

A Series of Articles written by EFCA West Pastors on How Our Statement of Faith Helps Us Navigate the Challenges of Everyday Life.

Christ's Return by Steve Jackson

Our Hope in The Midst of a Hurting World

"We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission."

Article 9, EFCA Statement of Faith

On March 15, 2020, I stood in front of a video camera delivering my first live streamed message to Faith Community Church in Newhall, California. At that point, I believed this would be a short-term solution to help flatten the curve as COVID-19 was just beginning to hit American soil. I had no idea how greatly it would affect the life of our nation and the ministries of our churches.

Add to this the racial tensions that followed, the polarizing elections in November, and the current unrest surrounding

vaccine mandates and you have some of the most tumultuous days that I can remember. As you consider the days in which we are living, Christ's return is a theological truth that must be embraced not just intellectually, but practically as well. If there is anything that is on short supply right now in our land, it is hope. The New Testament consistently points to the return of Jesus as a reason for hope. The Apostle Paul tells Titus this: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, *waiting for our blessed hope*, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13, ESV).

But how does our belief in the return of Christ bring us hope in days like these? First, some of you have lost loved ones this year, either to COVID-19 or other causes. Dealing with death can be one of the most difficult things we face here on earth, but the return of Christ allows us to grieve with hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 reminds us that when the Lord descends from heaven, the dead will rise first. They will join us in the air to meet the Lord. As hard as it is to say, "Goodbye," the return of Christ gives us hope that our separation from our loved ones in Christ is only for a season.

Secondly, as we focus on the return of Christ, we remind our hearts that His kingdom is the only one that lasts forever. These have been difficult days for our nation. I think we all feel the divisions that seem to be tearing us apart. Our temptation is to find our hope and identity in our earthly nation, but we must remember that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20, ESV). While it is good and right to invest ourselves in the good of our nation (i.e., vote, engage in politics, weigh in on legislation, etc.), we can never allow our allegiance to this land to eclipse our allegiance to our true home.

The return of Christ brings us hope, but also motivates us to action. The final recorded words of Jesus are, “Surely I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:20, ESV). Our time here is limited. This reality ought to motivate us to redeem the time. The Bible seems to impress upon us three things that we ought to prioritize as this day approaches. First, we ought to be serious about our sanctification (godly living). The Apostle Peter encourages us to consider what sort of people we ought to be in light of this coming day of the Lord, and his conclusion is that we ought to be a people committed to holiness and godliness (2 Peter 3:8-13). It is easy to become discouraged in the sanctification process, but remember that He will complete what He has begun in us on the Day (Philippians 1:6) when we finally see Him face to face (1 John 3:2-3). Second, we ought to be serious about investing in the forever kingdom rather than this earthly kingdom (sacrificial service). We must be willing to give of our material wealth to invest in Jesus’ kingdom, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-21). We must be willing to consider everything else as loss in order to gain Christ (Philippians 3:7), remembering that whoever has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for his name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29). And thirdly, we ought to be serious about proclaiming the good news of Jesus (energetic mission). We may wonder why it is taking so long for Jesus to return. Peter would remind us that He is being patient waiting for more to repent and enter the family of God (2 Peter 3:8-9). While we long for His return, we also ought to seize each day we have to make his gospel known to those who need to hear. He may be waiting for your son or daughter, neighbor or coworker, friend or relative to finally repent and believe.

Jesus is coming back soon! None of us knows when. So, let’s seize the day. What besetting sin is the Holy Spirit trying to root out of your heart? Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you. How might you better invest in the unshakable kingdom of Jesus? Has He entrusted to you resources to give? Give! Has He given you gifts to be used? Step up and serve! Who has He placed right around you who needs to hear the gospel? Speak up! One day Jesus is coming to make all things right (judgement) and all things new (restoration). Until then, He has much good to do in and through us. Don’t miss it!

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