

THE RETURN OF THE KING

The Book of Philippians #28

In our last few studies of Philippians we have looked at following the pattern of those who follow Christ, determined what being a citizen of heaven means, and identified those who are called enemies of the cross. Today we are going to look at the return of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. To keep us in context, here is what Paul says about these things in Philippians chapter 3.

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

Paul says we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But in truth, how eagerly are we waiting for our Savior’s return? How much thought do we actually give to the return of Christ? Oh, we’re aware that it is a future event and we believe He will indeed come again. But most of us are so preoccupied with our day to day lives that any time spent thinking about the future return of Christ is limited. And yet it would seem that we should give more thought to His return.

When we have guests over to our home we take the time and effort to make sure the house looks clean and uncluttered and the food is prepared so that our home looks inviting and our guests feel welcomed. We should do no less for our Savior. If we truly care for Him we don’t want Him to find us unprepared, our spiritual home cluttered with unrighteous junk and no welcome mat on the porch. Though no one knows the hour or the day of His return (Matthew 24:36), whenever that Day arrives we should be ready to greet Him. In His parable of the ten virgins Jesus warns us of this very thing.

MATTHEW 25:1-13

“The kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the Bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ And while they were going away to make the purchase, the Bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open up for us.’ But He answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.”

Jesus reminds us that unfinished business can have an effect on our ability to welcome Him when He returns. His return should be a happy and anticipated event because we were ready for His coming. We should, as Paul says, “eagerly wait” for the return of Christ. But it’s difficult to be eager about

something when you feel uneasy, unprepared, and caught off guard at His sudden appearing. There is a preparation that is needed in order for that day to be one of rejoicing and not one of dread.

The foolish virgins in this story lacked the essential ingredient needed to greet their Bridegroom. What little oil they had in their lamp was insufficient to keep it lit. And they had no flask containing extra oil. So on the day of His return they were caught unprepared and ill equipped to meet Him. Not until they heard the announcement that the Bridegroom was on His way did they go out to buy a supply of oil. But when they returned it was too late. The Bridegroom had closed the door to the wedding feast. When they asked Him to open the door He said to them, “I do not know you.” It must have been quite a shock to discover upon arriving at the wedding that their Bridegroom claimed He had no relationship with any of them.

To the foolish the return of the Bridegroom was simply a concept – like young women who hope for a knight in shining armor or a princess longing for her prince. Attaching no sense of urgency to the return of this Bridegroom they carried no flask and had insufficient oil in their lamps. So when reality intruded onto their concept they were caught off guard and hastily went out to buy oil. But while they were gone the door to the wedding feast was closed to them. It was too late. Their lamps were useless.

To the prudent the Bridegroom was a person and the urgency of His return was a reality they were prepared for. Their lamps and flasks were full, allowing them to light their lamps immediately upon hearing the news of His coming with no fear of running out oil. This preparation allowed them to respond immediately and gained them entrance into the wedding feast.

But this story is about more than oil. It is about knowing the Bridegroom before He comes and not presuming on His generosity. The foolish virgins were caught unprepared and unaware of the requirements for entry to the wedding feast. They assumed that when the Bridegroom came they would gain entrance. But their lack of oil failed them and so did their assumptions. In reality they never belonged to the Bridegroom and were never invited to the wedding feast.

But even those who place their faith in Christ can learn a lesson from this story. All believers must be prepared with enough oil to last until He comes again because He has delayed His coming. But as believers we must also live up to His expectations. If we do not live like we belong to the Bridegroom but live like we belong to the world then we too, in our own way, will be unprepared to meet the Bridegroom.

Our friend Marge was like that. She was a woman of faith, but by her own admission she was not ready for Christ to call her home when she received the news of her impending death due to Leukemia. In His mercy the Lord allowed her to live 16 months after her diagnosis before she died of her illness. During that time she prepared herself to see her Savior. She straightened out her life and allowed herself to live by faith in the remaining days she had left. She became a less self-centered woman and more freely talked of the Lord to others. When the time came for God to call her home she was fully committed to being with Him. She first dealt with her past and it was forgiven. She then dealt with her future and was ready when He called her home on December 6, 2010.

Now don't get me wrong. There is nothing you can do to merit salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* You cannot earn your salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God and a product of belief. When Christ comes again He is not looking for those who are working to be ready for Him, who are out buying oil for their lamps at the last minute. Rather He is looking for those

who are already His by faith. And if you are already His by faith then you have no need to fear being left behind when He returns.

The importance of being saved in preparation for the return of Christ applies to non-believers; but once saved the message of preparing for His return takes on a different connotation. Believers are to “eagerly wait” for their Savior. This means their welcome mat is out, their house has been swept clean and they have warm bread baking in the oven.

Preparing For Christ’s Return

Several Scriptures mention the return of Christ. Many provide instructions on how to be ready for His return. For instance, Romans 13:11-14 tells us to make no provision for the flesh in regards to its lust because the day of His return is much nearer than when we first believed. In other words don’t think you can slack off for a while and indulge in the flesh. You just might get caught, as they say, with your pants down. You don’t know when He will return. It may not be tomorrow but it’s a lot closer than it was when you first believed. Don’t take any chances of Him finding you disobedient when He returns.

Love is also an important ingredient in our preparation for the Lord’s return. 1 Peter says the end of all things is near so we are to be of sound judgment keeping fervent in our love for one another for love covers a multitude of sins. And in 1Thessalonians 3:11-13 Paul asks the Lord to cause us to increase and abound in our love for one another so that the Lord would establish our hearts without blame in holiness before the Father at His coming.

In Titus 2:11-14 Paul says we should live sensibly, righteously and godly while on earth all the while looking for the blessed hope and appearing of Christ. And James 5:9 says we should strengthen our hearts and not complain against one another because the Judge of all is standing at the door ready to return. The last thing we want to do is be in the midst of an unrighteous life and judging one another when the True Judge of all appears and takes us home.

And 1 John 2:28 says we should be abiding in Him so that we will have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame when He comes. We don’t want to be like the disobedient child who throws a party when his parents are away only to find his parents returned earlier than expected and he’s caught doing things he was told not to do. Instead of receiving praise from his parents he experiences shame and disappointment because of his disobedience. He thought he knew when his parents would return. But they came earlier than expected and he did not have time to “clean up his act” before they returned. We want to have our act together and “cleaned up” when Christ returns for us, no matter what hour of the day or night He returns.

This is not to imply that perfection is possible here on earth. We are all frail creatures and frequently fail in our quest for holiness. Even David whom God called “a man after My own heart” failed epically, committing both adultery and murder. But what brought David back into fellowship with God was a broken spirit and a contrite heart (Psalm 51:16-17). God forgives those who repent of their failures and restores those whose pride is willingly broken through humility. Like the prudent virgins, repentance and humility will be the oil that will sustain our lamps as we wait for and welcome His return.

There is one last thing to keep in mind in preparation for the return of Christ. Revelation 22:12-14 tells us that Jesus is coming quickly and that He will render rewards to every person according to what they have done. Because of this we are told to wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb so that we may have a right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the heavenly city. Those who do not wash

their robes in the blood of the Lamb will not gain the right to enter that city.

Whether we die before He comes or are alive when He returns without applying the cleansing blood of the Lamb to the doorposts of our sinful hearts we have no hope of entry. Outside the heavenly gates are those who claim they have no need of forgiveness; those who take pride in their sorcery and idolatry and those who love and practice lying. But inside are those who have renounced these things and have sought and found forgiveness in Christ.

The former will shrink back at the coming of Christ and will say to the mountains and the rocks, *“Fall on us and hide us from the presence of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”* (Revelation 6:16-17). But the later look forward to His coming and eagerly await the reward He brings with Him. They have no fear because God has not destined them for wrath. Through faith they have already obtained salvation through their Lord Jesus Christ, who died for them. So whether they are alive or asleep in death, when Jesus comes for them they will rise together and live with Him for eternity (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10).

When our daughter and son-in-law leave their two children with us while they go away our granddaughter always asks if they are coming back. We assure her every time they leave that they will return and we let her know in ways she will understand how long she needs to wait before that happens – after a nap, after dinner, after two sleeps with the moon or in a few minutes, etc. And when they do come back the first thing she says with great joy and enthusiasm is, “You came back!” Though she is repeatedly told her parents will return she is nonetheless always overjoyed and excited when they do.

There is something about a promise fulfilled that brings excitement to the occasion. When we long to be with someone, when we miss them while they are gone, we sense the incompleteness we have without them. Then, when they return, we feel complete again; content in their presence and their love for us. We are once again secure because their promise of returning has been fulfilled. They have proven themselves trustworthy, so when they are gone we relax in their absence, knowing they always keep their promise to return.

There are of course exceptions to this rule. Some parents abandon their children and never return. Some parents are prevented from returning through situations beyond their control involving death, sickness, or the consequences of divorce. But the child still waits for the parents return. A promise not fulfilled, whether by design or by fate, can have devastating consequences on the trust of a child. When what one expects does not come to pass trust starts to fade and cynicism grows in the disappointed heart.

The consequences of promises seemingly unfulfilled holds true of believers as well. For instance, we are told that Jesus is coming soon, that His coming is near. Yet these words were written nearly two thousand years ago. One could rightly wonder how “near” is “near”? And those who refuse to believe take advantage of this delay and start mocking those who continue to look for the return of their Savior.

1 PETER 3:3-4, 8-9

“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’ But do not let this fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

Though the Lord delays His coming we are told to wait expectantly for His return. And like a farmer who is waiting for his crop we are told to wait patiently until the fruit of our faith is revealed. We have planted the seeds and at His coming He will reward us for our crops of faith. Since His return is certain we are told to strengthen our hearts until that day arrives.

JAMES 5:7-8

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”

So we hold on to our faith, trusting in His word. His delay only makes the anticipation grow. After nearly two thousand years of this promise is it too far-fetched to believe that it could come in our lifetime? It truly is nearer than when we first believed and certainly a whole lot nearer than when the first believers believed. Maybe some of us here will still be alive when He returns. But whether or not we still inhabit this earthly body when He comes one thing is certain. Jesus is coming to take all believers home to be with Him.

When one of the ministers of Walnut Creek Pres became deathly ill several years ago Wendy and I and a friend of ours went to visit him in his home. He was not conscious so we could not tell whether or not he heard our prayers for him and our gratitude for his service to us. We left after about an hour, happy to have been able to say good bye to a faithful friend and fellow minister. Because we lived several hours away we did not know what happened after we left but were told the following story a few weeks later.

The night after we left the family gathered and was having a meal together. During the meal our unresponsive friend, their husband and father, woke up suddenly. Full of energy he sat down to dinner and ate with them, conversing as if he was his old self. When he was done eating he lay down on his hospital bed and went back to being unresponsive to anyone. Later that night his daughter reported to us that he suddenly sat up in bed and said, “It’s true. It’s all true”. Then he laid back down and breathed his last. She believed her father saw Jesus come for him. And he was overjoyed because Jesus had fulfilled His promise.

Like our granddaughter, this man was thrilled to find out that what he believed and what he himself had taught others was true. It was all true. Jesus returned and took him home, just as he had promised. In his own words he was in essence saying, “You came back! You said you would come back and you did. Your words are true. They are all true.”

There is no need for our hearts to be concerned that Christ will not return. If it was not going to happen then He would not have promised it to us. He leaves and returns for a purpose and that purpose involves us.

JOHN 14:1-3

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

Even His delay even has a purpose – to make sure all have a chance to come to Him and find redemption. For He does not want anyone to perish; He desires all to come to repentance and enter the

gate into eternal life (2 Peter 3:9). He delays out of His great love for His creation.

For the believer there is no need to be anxious about the return of Christ because He has made a way for us to be conscience clear upon His return. No matter how much debt we owe Him, no matter how many unrighteous deeds we have committed, they can be paid in full and wiped clean by the blood of the Lamb. These are the free gifts of God that He offers to all who seek Him. Only one requirement is necessary to claim these gifts of salvation and reconciliation— and that is faith; But faith in Who and faith in what?

ROMANS 10:9-11

“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ ”

Remember the parable of the ten virgins? Faith is the oil in the lamp that the five foolish virgins lacked. In contrast the five prudent virgins kept their lamps and their flasks full of faith because they knew the Bridegroom was coming even if He was delayed. Their containers of faith were not depleted while they waited. They took steps to make sure their faith would last until His return no matter how delayed He might be. But who is the Bridegroom and who is the bride?

EPHESIANS 5:25b-27

“Christ...loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

Jesus is the Bridegroom and the church is His bride. And there will be an actual wedding feast where the Bridegroom and the bride are joined together for eternity. The responsibility of the bride in anticipation of the coming of the Bridegroom is to make herself ready. She does that by clothing herself in acts of righteousness.

REVELATION 19:6b-9a

“ ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.’ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” And He said to me, ‘These are the true words of God,’ ”

There are two ways to prepare for the return of Christ. The first one is essential. You must confess and believe by faith that God raised Christ from the dead (Romans 10:9-11). Without faith when Christ returns you will be like the five foolish virgins, locked out of Heaven. But the second is also important. You must live out your faith; For God rewards those who are His according to their deeds (Luke 11:28; Revelation 11:8).

Without faith you will be like the five foolish virgins unprepared for His return. You will be locked out of heaven because without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). But with faith you will be like the five prudent virgins who were ready when the Bridegroom came. Like them the doors to the Kingdom will be opened to you gaining you entrance into heaven. But once in what reward will He

render to you?

REVELATION 22:12

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”

Any reward that awaits a believer will be directly linked to what they have done through and for Christ. As the saying goes, *“Only one life ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last”* (Only One Life by C.T. Stud).

Paul says we are to eagerly wait for a Savior. But we cannot “eagerly wait” for a Savior if we have no need of one. We cannot “eagerly wait” for His return if we are not prepared to receive Him. We cannot anticipate attending the wedding if we are not clothed in the proper wedding clothes of faith, humility, and forgiveness.

Though the penalty for all who have sinned has been paid by Christ only some accept this free gift of God (Romans 6:23); Though the opportunity for all to be ready for His return has been given only some prepare (Matthew 25:1-13); And though all are invited to the wedding feast only some respond to the invitation (Matthew 22:1-13).

Without faith we are not fully prepared for the return of Christ and will be left outside the gates of heaven, victims of our own choosing (Revelation 22:14-15). Others will celebrate the return of their King but we will be in despair because we were not willing to submit to His leadership (Luke 19:12-27). Others will enjoy the feast of life but we will be left weeping in the outer darkness (Matthew 22:11-13). The time to prepare for His return is now. We must not put it off another day. For there is soon coming a time when this Scripture will be fulfilled:

ROMANS 14:11-12

“‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.”

In J. R. R. Tolkien’s “Lord of The Rings” series a ring that was forged in the fires of Mordor was lost then found by a creature called a hobbit whose name was Bilbo Baggins. When he suddenly disappears he wills this ring to his nephew Frodo Baggins. He and a band of fellow hobbits form a foursome and travel to the land of Mordor to destroy the ring and its evil power in the fires of Mount Doom. Along the way others, interested in keeping the hobbits safe, join the group and travel with them to the land of Mordor.

The last book in the series is called, “The Return of the King”. It completes the story of a king who has been in hiding who, once discovered, unites the differing factions to defeat the evil that has grown in the land. The key to the success of the king’s mission is the destruction of the ring for it holds power over men and other creatures to succumb to evil. Only a hobbit is innocent enough to be able to carry the ring without succumbing to its evil influences. As the series ends the ring is destroyed without corrupting the hobbits in the process, evil is defeated, and the king is restored to power.

Sin is the ring that was forged in the fires of temptation. Jesus was the hobbit that was innocent enough to carry that sin and defeat it by destroying its power over men. Jesus is also the unrecognized King who returns to rule over His people. While sin reigned in the hearts of men death had power over them and evil reigned. But Jesus defeated sin and death cancelling out any power they had over us. Death

no longer has a sting and can no longer claim victory over us (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).

Soon the One who won the victory for us will return to claim His own and bring them safely into His kingdom. In the interim if we expect to hear words of affirmation and not words of displeasure from Him when He comes we must accept these truths, persevere in them and not retreat from faith.

HEBREWS 10:37-39

“For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in Him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

Soon and very soon we are going to see the King. It matters not whether we are alive or in the grave. The return of the King is imminent. All who hear His voice will rise to meet Him in the air and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This may bring terror to some, but it brings comfort to all whose hearts are prepared for His return, who “eagerly wait” for their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

They are not afraid of seeing Him for fear involves punishment and they are confident that any punishment which they deserved was nailed to the cross with Him (Isaiah 53:5-6). They have come to know and have believed the love which God has for them. His love is perfected within them, so that they have confidence in the Day of Judgment (1 John 4:16-18). They know their Savior is coming for them not out of anger but out of love, and not to punish but to reward. And until the Day of His return they are confident that God will supply all the grace they need to make it through whatever lies ahead. Until then they ‘eagerly wait’ for the return of their King.

SOON AND VERY SOON

Soon and very soon we are going to see the King
Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King

Should there be any rivers we must cross
Should there be any mountains we must climb
God will supply all the strength that we need
Give us grace till we reach the other side

We have come from ev'ry nation
God knows each of us by name
Jesus took His blood and washed my sins
And He washed them all away
Yes there are some of us
Who have laid down our lives
But we all shall live again on the other side

Soon and very soon we are going to see the King
Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King

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