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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Last Sunday of the Church Year

November 26, 2023

Text: I Thessalonians 5:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There are some things in the Christian faith that are crystal clear. One of these clear doctrines is the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without any doubt or uncertainty, we know that Jesus is coming again at the end of time with great glory, power, and majesty. Christians throughout the centuries may have debated what will happen before Jesus comes again; things like: who is the antichrist, does the nation-state of Israel have any bearing on what will happen in the Last Days, what kinds of natural and supernatural signs must happen before Jesus comes again, and so forth. But what is beyond any doubt or debate is that Jesus Christ is coming again at the end of time, what is commonly call the Last Day or the Day of the Lord. Take, for example, I Thessalonians 5:1–11. Let’s look at these verses to establish the abundantly clear fact that Jesus is coming again on the Last Day.

Let’s start with verse 1. The apostle Paul wrote, “Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.” The Thessalonian Christians knew very clearly they were living in the Last Days. They began with the coming of Jesus when He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. What the Bible calls the “end times” or the “Last Days” isn’t some futuristic time yet to come. We have been in the Last Days for over two thousand years. We’re living in them now! The author of the book of Hebrews began his letter with these words, “¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...” (Heb. 1:1–2). Christ Jesus is the end-times revelation of God the Father almighty. So, I will follow the approach of the apostle Paul and simply remind you of that which is clear. The end times began with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. That fact

changes everything for us. I'll have more to say about that in a few moments. But for now, concerning the times and seasons of the Last Days, you have no further need of instruction. We are living in the Last Days now; they began with the coming of Jesus. And that necessarily means Jesus can come again at any time. For we are living in the last days leading up to the Last Day, the glorious second coming of Jesus.

Now we can move onto another part of the Biblical teaching on the Second Coming of Jesus. I Thessalonians 5:2, "For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." Jesus will come again in the glory of His heavenly Father at the end of time suddenly and without warning. Paul used the image of a thief coming in the night. Thieves don't set up appointments to rob your house. They come unexpectedly. We know that it's possible someone may break into our house or our car at any time; we may even install security systems and take other preventative measures. But it's still surprising when it happens. That's how it will be with the Second Coming of Jesus: total surprise.

The unbelieving world will be caught off guard by our Lord's return. In fact, they will be horror struck. Listen to vs. 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." What is it they won't escape? God's righteous judgment of their lives. On the Last Day, the God whom they have ignored, hated, and despised will have returned to judge their every thought, word, deed, and intention; what they have done and what they have left undone.

The chief sin is the rejection of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus Himself taught that a person's eternal destiny is determined by whether or not they believe in Him as the Savior of mankind. Listen to John 3:17-19:

¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned

already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

There is no escaping that judgment. This truth, says the apostle Paul, is so clear the Thessalonian Christians are fully aware of it. And so are we here at Christ the King/Immanuel Lutheran Church.

We Christians should not be surprised when unbelievers in the world reject and scorn the Biblical Gospel. When you tell someone, Jesus came to save you from your sins, you are implying – quite strongly in fact, you are already condemned because of your sins. And that without faith in Jesus, he/she will face a fearful judgment which cannot be escaped. Remember our Lord’s sobering words, “people loved the darkness rather than the light...”

Saints of God, this, in part, is why we rejoice at every baptism, every time we hear one another confess our sins and receive God’s absolution (I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit), every time we receive Christ’s body and blood in the Holy Supper, every prayer seeking forgiveness, especially that great petition from the Lord’s Prayer, “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...” Every time someone confesses faith in Jesus as the Savior and receives His forgiveness, we are witnessing the divine work of the Holy Spirit. It’s truly a supernatural miracle. That sinner has passed from death to life, from darkness to light.

I began this sermon by saying the doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus is crystal clear. He’s coming again in divine glory and majesty. With that beginning statement, we have seen from I Thessalonians 5:1–3 the following clear facts about His second coming: 1) we Christians are living in the end times leading up to the coming of Jesus, 2) Jesus can return at any time, in fact, His return will be unexpected, and 3) the unbelieving world cannot escape His righteous judgment of their lives.

There are two things we must consider all too briefly I am afraid. First, though the world will be surprised by Christ's Second Coming, we Christians will not be. I Thessalonians 5:4–5a, “But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day.” It's true that we do not know the day or the hour of Christ's return. But we know He's coming. We are like those wise virgins in the parable from Matthew 25, today's gospel reading. We know Jesus, the Bridegroom is coming, not the specific day or the hour mind you. But through steadfast love and trust in Jesus and by hearing His Word in faith, we are like the 5 wise virgins who were well prepared for the Bridegroom's arrival. For you, dear saints of God, the clear doctrine of Christ's Second Coming is not a source of fear, like it is for the unbelieving world, but a source of great joy. Through we Christians will also appear before the heavenly throne, we will hear our Lord's commendation, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into my kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.” The blood of Jesus has cleansed us from all sins. By the mercy and grace of the Spirit, we Christians have already passed from darkness to light through faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Second, and lastly, we Christians live each and every day in the knowledge that at any moment, Jesus can come again. What characterizes our lives is faith, hope, and love. Look at vs. 8–9, “But since we belong to the day, let us be sober (not somber, but clear-headed, rightly seeing the world and life in it for what it truly is, God's love and grace from beginning to end!), having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...” Our minds and our hearts are covered with Christian faith (faith in Jesus as Savior), hope (in the eternal life Christ has prepared for us), and love (the divine love the Holy Spirit has poured into our hearts and now works its way out in our love for God and one another).

These things are clear to us. “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” (I Thess. 5:11). May the faith, hope, and love you have from Christ grow in your daily lives as we await His Second

Coming. And may such faith, hope, and love, encourage and strengthen everyone in your lives.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.