

FRIDAY: A Secret?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18¹⁵ 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.

Reflect:

It appears that the Thessalonians weren't concerned about their dead loved ones missing out on the resurrection... what they were concerned about was their dead loved ones missing out on Jesus' glorious return...

Why are the dead "in Christ" raised first? We don't know. Yet the dead being able to hear Jesus' words further illustrates the truthfulness of Scripture (cf. Jn5:28). Unfortunately many will twist these verses as evidence for a "secret rapture" of the church. Verse 16 sounds rather noisy to me.

Verse 18 indicates this teaching is to be put to use. Nowhere in the Bible will we find information given simply for the sake of knowing it. It always leads to action of some sort.

Respond:

Notice that Paul's authority is from Jesus Himself. Paul was an apostle – yet He referred to where his authority came from regularly. Do we do the same (especially when dealing with Christians)?

All of this hope for the grieving is based on God's past action in raising Jesus (4:14). How can you get better at reminding yourself of God's past actions on your behalf?

The "coming" (Parousia) of Jesus will be a splendid event. The word for "meet" (v17) implies we'll meet Jesus and accompany Him back to earth. What a parade!

Pray: Thank God that those "in Christ" will one day be with Him forever. Pray for someone you know who isn't "in Christ" to submit to His Lordship. Pray for the leaders of NLCC.

SATURDAY: Too Small?

Read: Isaiah 40

Reflect:

We're at the end of the series *Taking a Look at Our Faith*. I hope you've enjoyed the first of many journeys through a series together. Perhaps you've been exposed to new areas of Theology. Hopefully you've seen some old things with new eyes...and been challenged as a result.

One thing is for certain, we will never exhaustively know God. Try as we may – we'll never be able to fit Him into a box. We may think we have Him in one...but at that point the God we think we know has become our own idol.

How can we not be in awe of the One who created the heavens (40:26) and Who can orchestrate the rising and falling of empires (40:23-24)?

Respond:

Do you have a favorite sermon of the past 14 weeks? Why is it your favorite? Will you let me (tnerb7@yahoo.com) know?

Are you more in awe of God on this day than you were on May 24th of 2007? Why?

Who can you talk to about God this week? Will you?

Pray: Thank God for the many volunteers who make Sunday mornings at NLCC possible. Ask for God's blessing on all the God-fearing congregations who will be worshipping Him around the world today and tomorrow. Thank God for being God.

A "Secret" or a Source of Hope?

May 18 – May 24

If you look up "eschatology" in a standard dictionary you will read something similar to, "The department of theological science concerned with the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, hell."

In light of definitions similar to that, eschatology is a word that produces a variety of responses.

- Some do not have the slightest clue what it means or why it matters.
- Some "know what it means" and sadly ignore it, just like other parts of God's Word.
- Others "know what it means" and want nothing to do with it because it is perceived to be too confusing.
- Others "know what it means" and love talking about it because they want to know what is going to happen in the future.
- Still others "know what it means" and have their lives shaped by its implications.

Given this sampling of possible responses a natural question arises, "Why the disparity of responses to a single word?"

The word eschatology concisely means "the study of the last things." On one hand this includes any events happening at, or near (both before and after), the end of life as we know it (e.g., the second coming of Jesus and the final judgment). This seems to be as far as many people go with their understanding of eschatology.

- In light of this, it is easy to see why many people ignore it, thinking "it" is too far in the future to have any bearing on their daily life.
- This is also why some people relish talking about it, because they believe the Bible is trustworthy and anything God has put in it about the future must certainly come to pass.
- It is also why some people leave the topic of eschatology up to others, simply because the Bible is neither as detailed, nor as easy to understand, as we prefer and the "experts" are better at making sense of all that stuff anyhow.

While it may be shocking, the most important eschatological event ever was the first coming of Jesus. His first coming guarantees His second coming; it's only a matter of time. Furthermore, we are already living in the "last days" (e.g., Acts2:14ff; Heb1:2). Therefore, "Christian eschatology involves an expectation for the future which is rooted in what has already happened in the past" (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*. p20). The question of eschatology isn't "when" but "how" as in "how does this affect my life today?"

Eschatology is extremely practical – as is all of God's word. In 1 Thessalonians Paul mentions the 2nd Coming of Jesus in every chapter (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23). With that much emphasis does he also tell us the important details like "when" and "how will we know when it's near?" Not exactly, but he does give us important details. Yet we often ignore them...

Monday: *Non-negotiable*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Reflect:

In rather typical Pauline fashion, Paul has focused on the Indicatives (statements of fact) about the condition of those to whom he is writing (e.g., 1Thess1:6-9; 2:14; 3:6-9). Those indicatives have paved the way for what comes next.

Notice the word “ought” in verse one. It isn’t a matter that is up for discussion. It seems many people are ready to claim Jesus as “Savior” in order to be saved from eternal separation from God (i.e., hell). Yet we mustn’t forget Jesus is also “Lord,” what He says goes.

The good thing is that the Thessalonians (generally speaking) were in fact walking in a way that was pleasing to God. This is a result of them accepting the instructions which came from Jesus and Paul’s teaching (e.g., 2:13).

Respond:

The word for “instructions” is a military term – it is something given from an authoritative force; in this case, Jesus. How have you done this past week with a command from Jesus focused upon last week (Mt9:38)?

Is it possible to claim to know and love God if we don’t please Him? Granted, we will make mistakes – but do we seek to please Him “more and more?”

Notice Jesus is addressed as “Lord Jesus” in both verses. How can you develop a more healthy balance of Jesus as Savior and Lord?

Pray: Thank God for the clear instructions we have in His word. Thank God for someone who has cared enough about you to share how you might please God. Pray that you would develop a deeper desire to please God with all aspects of your life.

Tuesday: *God’s Will*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Reflect:

What is “God’s Will” for me? Does God want me to have job “x” or job “y”? Does God want me to marry person “x” or person “y”? Does God want me to talk to my friend about Jesus? Does God want me to...

Asking questions is important. Asking the right questions is vital. God’s will is for us to continually become more like Jesus (i.e., to be sanctified) in our thoughts and actions. Outside of that...we have a lot of freedom.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul focuses God’s will in the aspects of our sexual lives, our work lives, and how we deal with the loss of loved ones. Sex, work, and death – they affect all of us at one time or another. Whoever says God’s word is irrelevant for their lives must live a boring existence...

Respond:

The word for sexual immorality likely refers to immoral sexual intercourse (e.g., premarital and extramarital sex). How can NLCC help ensure this aspect of God’s will is not ignored?

Notice v5. In light of that – is there any excuse for a Christ-follower to be outside of God’s will in the area of sexuality?

The word for “solemnly warned” (v6) indicates nothing was held back in the explanation process. Are there areas about God we “hold back” from telling people? Why?

Pray: Thank God for the relevancy of His word. Pray for the sexual purity of NLCC and all who aspire to follow Jesus. Pray for a heart, mind, and will that realizes how God’s directives for us are for our own good.

WEDNESDAY: *God’s Teaching*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12⁹ Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Reflect:

Jesus told us the world would know we follow Him if we have love for one another (Jn13:34-35). So how are we doing? The Thessalonians were doing great (e.g., 1:6; 2:14) – but there was still room for improvement (4:10).

Being taught by God sounds like a wonderful thing doesn’t it? If only we could be taught directly by God how to show love for one another. Well, we can (v9). That word indicates the Holy Spirit is doing the teaching (cf. Jer31:33-34).

Why do we bother with doing God’s will? Well, it is commanded of us (cf. Monday & Tuesday). It is also for the benefit of others; “outsiders” is literally “the ones outside” – which stands in sharp contrast to those who are “in Christ” (e.g., 4:1).

Respond:

Notice v9 has the same concept of v1 – the Thessalonians know what to do. How are we doing with applying what we know to do?

Read Galatians 5:13-26. How does your life reflect your willingness to be taught by God?

The word “quietly” implies restraint from foolish speech – a general peace instead of turmoil. How can this be a positive influence for non-Christians to see?

Pray: Thank God for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Pray for your submissiveness to the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Pray for God to raise up workers for the harvest (Mt9:36-38).

THURSDAY: *Grief*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14¹³ 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.

Reflect:

Up to this point the followers of Jesus in Thessalonica were “in the know” and their lives showed evidence of that knowledge. Yet here is something about which they were ignorant. Perhaps they misunderstood a teaching...or maybe never heard it – we don’t know. Yet I wonder...what didn’t they know?

Certainly they knew about the resurrection of Jesus (cf. Acts17:1-3). Furthermore, they knew that He was coming back (cf. 1Thess1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23).

Apparently grief over the loss of loved ones was behind their distress (v13 means they died – not that they’re taking a nap). Yet what was their difficulty? Were they missing something – or are we?

Respond:

Read Romans 12:1-2. How important is our mind to God? Will our lives ever change if we don’t think differently?

Notice this passage doesn’t say that we can’t grieve, but our grief can be tempered by remembering God’s promises to us.

Did you know Jesus’ resurrection is as valid any other claim in history (cf. Acts9; Gal2:9-11; 1Cor15:3-8)? Certainly we’d have documentation somewhere of people denying this claim if it weren’t true...

Pray: Thank God that Jesus is returning – pray that your life is influenced by that fact. Pray for the unity of NLCC and all God-fearing congregations. Pray for the upcoming College Press Teacher Training on May 31st at our building.