

My hope in us talking and reading the Scriptures is that we're going to read and look at some quotes and that God would make us a people who really do have our minds and our hearts set on His return. My hope is that our minds and our hearts are longing for the return of Jesus Christ. It's been my burden all week long as I've prayed, prepared and thought about this opportunity we have together as a campus. My hope has been that the Holy Spirit would use this time to continue to cultivate in us a heart that is not just cognizant of the reality that Jesus Christ is coming back to make all things new, but that we become a people who long for that reality. In Luke 5, these men came up to Jesus and asked Him, "Hey, the disciples of John the Baptist fast. Why don't your disciples fast?" Jesus' response was remarkable. He said, "Well the guests at the wedding feast don't fast when the bridegroom is here. But there's going to be a day when the bridegroom is taken away, and in that day, they'll fast." What He was saying was there's going to be day when He leaves, and until He returns, His followers are to long for His return. That's my hope and my prayer, and that's what I hope you take away from this time together tonight.

There have been a lot of experiences over the last couple of months that have gotten me thinking in that direction. I had the opportunity to preach at a conference, and as I studied, I was struck by how often the writers of the Scriptures held forth the hope of Jesus Christ and His return in front of God's people. One thing in particular that I read this last month that really got my heart and my mind thinking this direction was a book I was asked to read about John Calvin. Some of you may know who John Calvin is. He was a pastor during the reformation in Switzerland. He was a great pastor, and he wrote a lot of books. He was a theologian. He was a man who God used and continues to use to do mighty things through His church, particularly during the Protestant Reformation. In this book was a chapter by a pastor named Sam Storms, a pastor up in Oklahoma City. Dr. Storms wrote a chapter about John Calvin's view of heaven, not only about what Calvin thought about heaven, but also this is how it informed his daily life. This is how his view of heaven and his meditations on heaven empowered him to live out his faith daily and to shepherd God's people daily. I was pierced to the heart in this chapter. It talks about how John Calvin had written a letter to a woman who was married to a leader with the French Reformation. She had some sickness, and in a direct reference to her disease, this is what Calvin said, "They, that is our physical afflictions and diseases should moreover serve for us medicines to purge us from worldly affections and retrench (remove) what is superfluous or unnecessary in us. And since they are to us the messengers of death, we ought to learn to have one foot raised to take our departure when it shall please God." And that quote just hit me like a ton of bricks. We ought to learn to have one foot raised to take our departure when it shall please God. And of course Dr. Storms follows up with his own question. He asked, "Do we live everyday with one foot lifted ever so deftly off the ground, in constant alert and anxious expectation of the moment when we will depart this world and enter into the splendor of heaven and the presence of God Himself?" Do we live with one foot raised? So I thought about this for myself and for us as a church family. I want us to be a church family marked by lives lived with one foot raised. It really is remarkable to think about how often the Scriptures talk about this hope of Christ and His return. Thinking about that, meditating on that, setting our heart on that helps us to lift our foot.

Many Christians don't think about Christ and his return because we simply don't know what the Bible says about it. We've never read those passages of the Bible. When we do open the Bible, it's definitely not in those places. In the membership class, we use to ask the question, "If I asked you, as a Christian, to take us to the part of the Bible that talks about heaven, where would you take us?" Most people have no idea where the Bible talks about heaven, or if it even does. Most people wouldn't even know. It's interesting that if that's where we're putting all our hope, that one day we're

going to die and we're going to be here no more, for we're going to be in heaven with God, and yet we don't even know what the Bible says about it. That's one of the reasons we just don't think about Christ and His returning. We don't know what the Scriptures say about it. I just want to read you a couple of passages, so if you get asked that question, you'll have a couple of places to go.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is writing to this church in Thessalonica, and these people are grieving. So Paul is wanting to comfort them and remind them, "Hey listen, we don't grieve as people who have no hope. We have a glorious hope because Jesus Christ is returning." Then he goes into what Jesus Christ's return is going to be like. Verse 16 says, "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. 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." This is really what makes heaven and Christ's return heavenly, that we're going to be with the Lord forever. In fact, John Piper, a pastor in Minnesota, asked this great question. He said, "If you could have heaven and all its joys and all its delights, if you could see your relatives that have passed away before you, if you could get there and have no more pain and no more tears, if you could have heaven without Jesus Christ, would you want it?" It's a great question because it really gets to the heart about what is heavenly about heaven and what is beautiful about the Lord's coming. Well, for us as believers, what's beautiful is we're always going to be with the Lord. Paul finishes that little paragraph there by saying, "Therefore, encourage each other with these words." This is what it's going to be like, brothers and sisters.

Revelation 21 is another place to see what the Scriptures say about Christ returning and new heavens and the new Earth. John the apostle, has had the curtains of heaven pulled back, and God is allowing him to look into what it's like. This is what he sees and recounts, 21:1, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more (representing chaos in the Bible). And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Now I bet some of you have been married for way too long to remember what it was like for your bride to walk down the aisle and for you to see her standing there. And some of you haven't been married, so you don't know what that's like. Let me promise you that John is using the most intimate, beautiful language imaginable to describe this future reality of what's going to happen when Christ returns. It's unbelievable. He's saying it's going to be like a bride adorned for her husband.

Almost every week now, I have the opportunity to stand and be a part of officiating weddings here at the Village. I love these young godly men and godly women who get married. I get to stand in front with the groom and watch as the doors swing open and this bride adorned for her husband walks down the aisle. It's beautiful. Most of the time I'm choking up, trying to hold it together. It's almost too beautiful for words. He says, "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold the dwelling place of God is with man." So there it is again, we're with God. We, His children, His people are with Him. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away . . . making all things new."

Cornelius Plantinga, a theologian, wrote a commentary on this verse. He said, "In a vision lovely enough to break a person's heart, John shows us what God showed him, that up ahead of us, after centuries of tribal feuds and racial arrogance, after centuries of xenophobic snapping at each other, after we human beings have silted history full with the debris of all our antagonisms—after all that, the city of God will descend to us, and God will dwell with us, and, once more, God will make all things new. In a thousand ways, God will gather what's scattered, rebuild what's broken, restore what has been emptied out by centuries of waste and fraud. In a thousand ways, God will put right what's wrong with His glorious creation. In fact, the Bible hints that the new heaven and earth will even surpass the original creation." This is the future reality of what happens when Christ returns. C.S. Lewis would put it this way, "The coming of Christ for Christians is like getting to the end of the story and realizing that it was only the beginning of the real story, that all

of our life in this world, and all of our adventures has only been the cover and the title page. And now at last, we are beginning chapter one of the great story which no one earth has ever read, which goes on forever in which every chapter is better than the one before." If this is what the Scriptures say is the beginning of the story for us, this is the future hope that awaits those of us who are in Christ. This is what's going to happen when Christ returns to make all things new. And the Scriptures encourage us, command us, exhort us, instruct us to think about this, to meditate on this reality and set our minds and hearts on it. I could read you a dozen Scriptures here, but I will read just a few.

At the end of Revelation 22, Jesus says to John, "Surely I am coming soon." And John's response is the response that all Christians should have. John responds, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus come." Colossians 3:1-4 would say it this way; Paul writes, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." He's saying, "Set your mind on these things. Then when He appears, you'll be there with Him." In Titus, Paul writes to Titus, a pastor, "True Christianity trains us as Christians to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world. Awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Peter, who spent a lot of time with Jesus Christ wrote it this way in 1 Peter 1:8-9, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls... Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So I join the writers of the Scriptures and Jesus for us to be a people whose hope is fully set on the revelation of Jesus Christ, whose hope is fully set on Jesus Christ, our God and Savior coming and making all things new. What's amazing to me is that when we do this, the Scriptures teach us that those who are heavenly-minded in the way that the Scriptures would instruct us to be are of the most profound and utmost earthly good. The Scriptures would say that when you're heavenly minded in the way that you ought to be, you're of profound earthly good and being heavenly minded impacts and has implications for your life and my life every single day.

That's really where we live, right? We don't live in an ivory tower theologizing and talking theoretically about the return of Jesus Christ. That's not where most of you spend your days. Most of you aren't tucked away reading some commentary about Revelation 21. Most of you are walking through the daily grind day by day. One of the questions I would assume you're asking as I think about these instructions in the Scripture to put my mind on Christ and His return is, "Okay what are the implications for my life today?" Tonight when I leave this place how in the world does meditating on Jesus Christ, on His return empower me in those moments of need? How does it influence my daily need?"

What I want to do is give you four reasons as to why this matters every day. The first thing is this. Meditating on Jesus Christ and His return empowers us through suffering. It's remarkable for me as a pastor to read the Bible and to see how the pastors in the Bible comfort their people who are suffering. Because all through the Scriptures are suffering. In every century, Christians have suffered and will continue to suffer. They walk through trials, they walk through frustrations and they walk through situations and circumstances that threaten joy and faith in Jesus Christ. So, to read how the pastors in the Scriptures comfort their people is really remarkable. They're always waving the banner of Christian hope, the future reality of Jesus Christ returning in front of the people's faces. They are always encouraging their people in that.

I'll read a few of these passages. The church in Rome was a church that was persecuted in unbelievable ways. Eventually, after Paul would write, "They would be persecuted and martyred for their faith by being fed to lions in the coliseum," Paul himself would be beheaded because he was a Christian. So Paul writes this letter to the church in Rome. This is what he says about their sufferings, and his own sufferings. In Romans 8 he says this, "For I consider the sufferings of

this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us." So you've got the glory of Jesus Christ's coming and setting up and making all things new and rescuing and restoring the world. And you've got sufferings now. What Paul is saying is, "I've thought about the glory of Christ's returning, and I've thought about what it's going to be like when He comes and makes all things new. Those thoughts and meditations on how glorious that's going to be inform me how I walk through my day to day trials and tribulations. What I've come to the conclusion of is those sufferings that I walk through every day are not even worth being compared to the glory that's going to be revealed." That is marvelous for me to hear. That in Paul's sufferings, persecutions and struggles, he's thinking about the glory that is going to be revealed in Christ and His return and he's saying, "It's not even worth comparing. It's worth it. These sufferings you walk through, it's worth it because of how glorious it's going to be when our Savior appears and when He makes all things new."

Peter, who was crucified upside down, wrote this to the church who was suffering in his day. He said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; according to His great mercy He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." He's talking about salvation here, that God has saved us through Jesus Christ. "He's caused us to be born again to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you. And in this you rejoice, though now for a little while if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials." In other words, you know this inheritance that's waiting for you and what that does is empower you now through your trials, if necessary, to continue to rejoice because you know what's waiting for you in heaven. It's unfading and imperishable and so, think about that.

In Hebrews, the author would say about Jesus in His own sufferings, "That for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross." So the writer of Hebrews is reminding the people who are suffering to look to Jesus as you suffer. "He suffered, so look to Him as an example of how to be empowered by God's Spirit through suffering." What do you see as you look at Jesus? You see that for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. So, over and over again you see in the Scriptures that God's people are empowered through suffering by having their minds and hearts saturated by the reality that Jesus Christ is returning and it's going to be more glorious than we can even imagine.

And this is where most of live. I've sat in this room all day long and I've looked out and seen those of you who are going through cancer. I've seen those of you who have recently been broken up with by your girlfriend or boyfriend. I've seen those of you who are struggling through infertility, those of you who have wayward children you're burdened about every single day and those of you whose marriage is in disrepair. This is where we live life, in the daily grind. Even if I didn't hit you on any of those examples, all of us, every day have something that provokes our heart and threatens our joy and faith in Jesus Christ. What the writers of the Scriptures are saying is that in the darkness as Christians, an antidote to suffering is to look toward the light at the end of the tunnel. The sufferings we walk through here now is not a cave, but a tunnel. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. There is hope for us and they wave in front of us this hope of Jesus Christ and His return and it empowers God's people through suffering. As we believe how glorious it's going to be, we say with Paul, "Our sufferings aren't worth comparing to that. It's worth it."

The second implication for us as we think about Christ and His return is it helps us fight idolatry. We as a church family talk about this every week. You and I are so prone to take good things that God has given us for our enjoyment, for our joy and His glory, to take those things and make them ultimate to the point where we actually begin to be controlled by them. We begin to serve those things or those people that we've made ultimate and we worship them. That's called idolatry.

I went to a small Christian high school, which was interesting to me as I grew up in public school. I went to a Christian high school because I wanted to play basketball and our basketball coach was there. It was all sorts of new things to

learn among these Christians. I went to chapel and Bible classes. I once had a conversation with a guy after chapel or Bible class about putting your hope in Christ in His return. The conversation went a little bit like this. The guy said, "Man, I really want Jesus Christ to come back. I'm really excited about that. But I'm going to be honest, I don't want Him to come back before I get married because I don't want to die a virgin." We chuckled at the moment, but doesn't that very well describe the tension in our own heart? Revelation 21:22, "Jesus is coming." "It's great, that's where our hope needs to be, Jesus I want you to come back but I want to do this first. I want to experience this first. I want to enjoy this on earth, first." It's remarkable how prone we are to make idols and worship things here below. C.S. Lewis would say, "It would be like us desiring to play in the mud because we don't understand that a holiday at the sea is offered to us; that the Lord Jesus Christ finds our desired way too weak. We're way too weak and so easily satisfied." Thinking about Christ, having our hearts persuaded about what the Scriptures say about Him and about His return, treasuring Him above all things helps us fight off this tendency to treasure things here below more than we should. I don't know what that is for you. I don't know what you're prone to worship here. I know that for me it's my family at this point in my life. I love my wife and I love my ten-month-old boy. I heard about marriage and I heard about being a father, but I never knew the joy of it. But how quickly these joys here on earth will lead me to ever so subtly and slowly just set my foot down here. I don't want to live with one foot off the ground. I want to be here because this is better than that future reality. I would never say that like my friend in high school did, but that's how we live. Thinking about Christ and His return, meditating on it, encouraging one another about it, singing about it helps us believe that it is real. It's not just theory, or theology; it's real. It helps us to fight against our temptation to worship other things and other people here below.

The third implication is meditation on Christ and His return helps us in our witness. The Scriptures teach that when we have our hope fully set on Jesus Christ and His return, a really bizarre and beautiful thing happens and that is that we as a community of faith become aliens here on this earth. We become strangers and pilgrims because our hope is in heaven and not here. We walk to the beat of a different drum here. Peter says, "Beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul; keep your conduct among the Gentiles [unbelievers] honorable so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of His visitation." We look differently because we have different values. We treasure something else in this world and that informs every thing that we do. We are pilgrims here, strangers and aliens just passing through until Christ comes.

A good example of this would be refugees. Refugees are refugees, not because they have an accent or they dress a little differently, although those may tip you off at times. It's that they value different things than we value because of their upbringing and culture and experiences. Their heart values things in a different way than we do. It's noticeable. Some things for good and some for bad, but we notice. That's what the Scripture is trying to paint that that's what we value, who we value, what we treasure, how we've been transformed by Christ and His gospel. It's very obvious that these people are strangers here. They're like exiles or pilgrims. Sadly enough, though, because our hope's not fully set on the Lord Jesus Christ, we as Christians end up looking not that much different. In fact, one of the things that lead me in thinking about this sermon was that my wife was going to a Bible study and apparently the teacher of the Bible study made an off the cuff comment about this very thing. She was talking about how we are to be aliens. She said, "What I see is a lot of Christians who try to look as much like the world as they can, but still keep their morals." A pastor in Florida wrote a whole book about this. He said, "Christians make a difference in the world by being different from this world, not by being the same. We need to remember that God has established His church as an alternative society, not to compete with or copy this world, but to offer a refreshing alternative to it." This is what we talk about all the time here in Denton, that we want to be an alternate city within our city. We don't want to look just like Denton; we want to look different. This author describes this in his own words. "When we forget this, we inadvertently communicate to our culture that we have nothing unique to offer, nothing deeply spiritual or profoundly transforming. Tragically, this leaves many in our world looking elsewhere for the difference they crave." That's convicting, for me. We are different, not because we're trying

to be different but because we are. Our values have informed everything that we do. He who we treasure has changed everything about us and it's noticeable.

Fourthly and maybe most importantly, meditating on Christ and His return keeps us ready for Christ's return. I'll end with the Scripture we started with, "Therefore stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming, but know this that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would have not let his house be broken into. Therefore, you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming in an hour you do not expect." Lewis Smeeds, who was a teacher at a seminary in California, said this, "The hardest task for people who believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ is in living the sort of life that makes people say, 'Ah, so that's how people are going to live when Christ returns and righteousness takes over our world.'" That's really what we're talking about, being these types of people. So I really do wish I could spend a lot of time here talking about how that happens in our hearts, how in the world you and I think about Christ in such a way that it actually cultivates a heart that lives a certain way. That it changes everything about us.

I don't know how you will cultivate that kind of heart and mindset. I don't know how you cultivate heavenly-mindedness in your own life. All of us are different, so for me to give you six steps and say, "This is what we all need to do and here's going to be the result," would be me being real dishonest with you. I think that would be a great conversation for you to have with your roommate, spouse or friends. What does it look like to cultivate heavenly-mindedness? What does it look like to become a person who meditates and sets my mind and my heart on His return in such a way that leads me to living life a certain way? We can all start by admitting to ourselves and to God that we're not there yet and asking the Holy Spirit to help us begin to move in that direction. I want to encourage you to spend some time really thinking through where you're at in all of this. We've read the Biblical commands. The Bible is very clear about what we should be thinking about, where our hearts should be, where our treasure should be. Spend some honest time in reflection, before God, and in honesty with ourselves think through, "Where am I? Am I really living life with one foot off the ground or do I love being here on earth? Do I treasure things here on earth more than I treasure Christ?" It's not wrong to love your life; it's just wrong to love your life more than you love Christ. Set some time aside tonight to think about these things and to ask the Holy Spirit to begin to change your heart and to turn you into the type of person who longs for Christ and His return; who's groaning for the redemption of the world and even your own body. That's what I hope.