

## **Sermon Outline**

### **“Eschatology”**

#### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 – Jeff Purswell – June 19, 2011**

**Main Idea:** Eschatology (the study of last things) assures us that God’s purposes will prevail and motivates us to live faithfully until they do.

#### **Eschatology is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ (4:13-14).**

1. There was a misunderstanding among the Thessalonians about the Christian who dies. The thought was that either they wouldn’t be resurrected or they would miss out on something glorious when Christ returns.
2. In verse 14, Paul gives the reason the Thessalonians should have hope for believers who have died. Because Jesus conquered sin and purchased redemption, there is a future hope for believers. Because Christ was resurrected, we will be resurrected. Therefore, their future hope, and ours, is rooted in Christ’s past work. It is rooted in the gospel.

#### **Eschatology is centered on the return of Christ (4:15-16).**

1. After affirming that believers will be resurrected, Paul, in verse 15, now locates that resurrection at the return of Christ. Paul eases their minds: the dead in Christ will not be excluded from the “Grand Celebration” of Christ’s return. It’s Jesus’ very return that will trigger the resurrection. Through the “cry of command,” the dead will be summoned from their graves. And in answering their question, Paul re-directs their focus to the main event, the centerpiece of eschatology: the return of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ return will be:
  - a. A Personal and Visible Return: Jesus will physically return for all mankind to see. As Rev. 1:7 says, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him.”
  - b. A Climactic Return: When Jesus comes back, it will be a climactic event that ushers in the consummation of God’s purposes: the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the new heaven and new earth.
  - c. A Triumphant Return: There will be a profound difference between the first coming of Christ and his second coming: His first coming was in humiliation—characterized by obscurity, poverty and suffering. His second coming will be in exaltation—characterized by triumph and glory. There will be a universal disclosure of Christ’s splendor and honor, authority and dominion. He who came first as a lamb, will return as a lion. And every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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2. Our tendency is to be caught up in times and seasons, charts and graphs—the events of the end, the “when” and the “how.” The Bible is primarily concerned about the “who.” The early church looked NOT so much for a succession of events, but for the arrival of a Person.

### **Eschatology looks forward to perfect fellowship in the presence of God (4:17)**

1. In the opening pages of Scripture, we see God preparing a garden, setting his image-bearers in that garden, providing for them, blessing them and fellowshiping with them. But sin devastated this fellowship, bringing death and defilement. Now, because of sin, that fellowship was, and still is, partial; imperfect. But history awaits one final act in this divine drama, when Jesus himself will descend from heaven, announced by archangel and trumpet, and the dead shall be raised; and living believers shall be transformed—and, as verse 17 says, “so we will always be with the Lord.”
2. As Christians, that’s the future that awaits us: perfect fellowship with our Creator and Savior, all sin destroyed, all corruption and distortion removed from creation; no shame, no guilt, no barrier—perfect friendship with God and those He’s saved. The prospect is thrilling; the alternative is terrifying.

### **Eschatology pronounces the coming justice of God (5:1-3)**

1. In chapter 5, Paul looks at the return of Christ from the standpoint of unbelievers who do not belong to Jesus. Paul is comforting a people tried in the fires of persecution. Part of his consolation is this: those persecuting you, those who reject the gospel of Christ, those who flaunt their autonomy and live God-ignoring lives will receive justice.
2. That’s what eschatology pronounces: when Christ returns, He will bring an end to all opposition, to all who reject his rule and deface and spoil his good creation. Creation is like a beautiful palace where a riot has broken out. But God’s coming to fix it, to set it right.
3. Because God is unimaginably holy—his character flawless and unbending, his standards absolutely righteous, his judgments perfectly just—he must judge sin and those who renounce his authority. For those who haven’t trusted Christ, that day is coming like a thief at night and with it “sudden destruction” and no escape. Instead of the perfect, blissful, fulfilling experience of total joy in the presence of Christ forever and ever there will be, to use the words of Jesus himself: “the fire of hell,” “eternal fire,” “torment,” “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” “outer darkness” and “eternal punishment.”

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### The purpose of eschatology is to provide hope and motivation for our daily lives now (5:4-11).

1. Eschatology should not only inform our understanding of final things but should function in our lives. Our future hope should fuel the way we live today. Below are two primary ways that eschatology is meant to function:
  - a. To encourage us with hope in a certain future: When the Bible teaches about the end times, it's meant to infuse our hearts with hope: God is sovereign over every molecule in creation. Nothing can thwart his purposes or plans, and history is heading for his appointed goal. Our lives are in his hands and nothing can cause us ultimate harm; everything that comes to us passes through his wise and loving hands; every trial or pain or ambiguity, is being molded by him to bring us good. And a day is coming, that what we cannot see now, we will see then.
  - b. To exhort us to live consistently with our hope and expectation: In Scripture, eschatology always has as its goal an ethic – a way of life – a response to God's Word about the future. In 5:6, we are exhorted to be "awake" and "sober."
    - i. "Awake" means to be vigilant or watchful; our moral radar is engaged. We are alert to our call as a believer; awake to the opportunities God gives us for faithfulness.
    - ii. "Sober" means to be self-controlled, thinking clearly, not tossed about by circumstances or emotion. Our mind is fixed on the truth of God's word, and so we are stable.
    - iii. Our way of life is summed up in verse 8— "faith, love, and hope"—the essence of the Christian life.

## Conclusion

1. How can we be ready for Christ's coming? We shouldn't be fixated on the news in the Middle East, consumed by current events, or frightened by what's happening in the world. Instead we should be resting in Christ and living in light of his Word.
2. Preparation is not complicated. It's not anxious anticipation or following foolish predictions. It is living faithfully for our Master. As Jesus said in Matt. 24:26, "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes." Being faithful to where the Master has called you is preparing for the Lord's return.

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### **Fellowship Starters**

1. Take time as a care group to read 1 Thess. 4:12-5:11.
2. What is your attitude toward the return of Christ? Is Christ's return your "blessed hope"?
3. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, how is eschatology rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ? How is eschatology the culmination of God's redemptive purposes in Christ?
4. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16, on what or whom is eschatology centered? How does a right focus about the return of Christ help us avoid the tendency to get caught up in times and seasons, charts and graphs?
5. How does eschatology impart faith and hope in a certain future, even through inexplicable suffering and trial?
6. How does eschatology motivate us to live faithfully in the present while still hoping in the glorious eternity that awaits believers?
7. How does eschatology motivate us to share the good news to a lost and dying world (see 1 Thess. 5: 1-3)?