

LIVING THE WORD—Week 15 (Sun., May 3 – Sat., May 9)

The God of the Mighty Acts: the Great Story of God's Relentless Love

The Coming (Part 1)—Jesus Will Return As He Has Promised

Matthew 24-25; Acts 1:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 20:11-22:5

Key Verse: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Our journey through the story of God's mighty acts has almost ended. The one remaining act of God in our study still lies in the future—the second coming of Jesus Christ. We will spend two weeks on this event, since it has such a sweeping impact on the teaching of the New Testament. Nearly every book has something to say about our hope, about end time events, or about how we should live now in the light of what will happen in the future.

Much of New Testament teaching about future events draws on the prophets of the Exile. When Jesus warns about hell and future events (Mark 9:48; 13:24-27), he quotes Isaiah (13:10; 34:4; 66:24) and Zechariah (2:6). When Paul talks about the resurrection and the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:55; 1 Thess. 5:3), he quotes Hosea (13:14), Isaiah (47:9,11), Jeremiah (6:14), and Ezekiel (13:10). And the visions of Revelation are full of language from the prophets.

There has been much controversy among Christians about various aspects of what will happen when Jesus returns. These include debates over whether Jesus will reign for a 1,000 years in Jerusalem, whether hell is eternal torture or final destruction, whether there will be a great tribulation before Jesus returns and who will experience it, who the beast is in Revelation, who the 144,000 are in Revelation—in fact, over the meaning of almost every vision in Revelation!

But there are a few central things over which virtually all Christians have agreed. First, Jesus will return—and we don't know when (Acts 1:9-11; Mark 13:32-37; 1 Thess. 5:1-3). When he returns, the dead in Christ will rise (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-53). There will be a judgment day determining whether people receive reward or punishment (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15). And there will be some kind of heaven and hell—eternal life for those who believe in Jesus and final punishment for those who were not saved (Matt. 10:28; 25:46; Mark 9:42-48; Rev. 20:11-22:5). God's plan is to return us to life in the garden with Him (Rev. 2:7).

Next Week: The Coming—Part 2—Jesus Will Reward Those Who Are Ready (Matthew 25; 28:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-24; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 2 Peter 3:8-14)

Memory Verse (for Weeks 13-16): Ephesians 4:4-6

On the Mountain ("Love God"—set aside 30 minutes this week for quiet time with God)

1. Find a time when you can sit alone and uninterrupted. Spend a few moments preparing your heart to meditate on your relationship with God.
2. Read through Philippians 3:10-21 two or three times.
3. Reflect on Paul's example and how you may or may not be following that example.
4. Reflect on whether your heart is more often set on earthly things or whether you are "eagerly waiting" for the return of Jesus.
5. Pray for the Lord's return and that you will be ready and waiting.

In the Gathering (“*Love Each Other*”—discuss with your home church or small group)

1. The movie, “The Bucket List,” has prompted a lot of people to ask what they would do if they knew they only had one year to live (sometimes adding, “if money were no object”). What kinds of things do many people list? What would you list?
2. How is that question different than asking, “What would I do if I knew Jesus would return this year?” What, if anything, would be different on that list?
3. A constant prayer among early Christians was, “*Marana tha*” (“Come Lord!—1 Cor. 16:22; see also Rev. 22:20). It was often prayed at the Lord’s Supper in the early church. Why do you think we don’t pray that prayer very much in America today?
4. How can hope in the Lord’s return change the way people grieve (1 Thess. 4:13-18)?
5. Do you have anything to share from your time with God, your family, or in the world?
6. If there is time, discuss the “In the World” section below.
7. Pray using the Lord’s Prayer as a guide. Pray especially that the kingdom would come in our lives and in the world.

Around the Table (“*Love Your Family*”—sit at home and talk together as a family)

1. Who is someone you look forward to seeing when those asleep in Christ are raised (1 Thess. 4:13-18)?
2. With younger children, ask them what they think heaven will be like. Read Rev. 21:1-22:5 and talk about what is hard to understand or to imagine about what is described.
3. With older children or adults, talk more about the first 2 questions at the top of the page.

Into the World (“*Love the World*”—prayerfully consider God’s mission for us in his world)

1. Read Acts 1:1-11. What did Jesus call the apostles to do rather than just stand and watch the sky? If we really believe what the Bible teaches about the end times, what should we be doing in addition to praying for Jesus’ return?
2. Read Matthew 25:14-30. What has Jesus left with his followers until he returns that he wants us to try and make grow? What has he entrusted to you personally? What has he entrusted to all of us as his church?
3. How do you think we are doing? What could we do better?