

## Transcendent Politics

**“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge . . . ”** (2 Timothy 4:1).

We’ve all heard this verse preached from time to time. Paul knows that he is about to be martyred, and he is solemnly giving Timothy this charge to continue the ministry of reaching out with the Gospel and instructing believers how to live as Christians. These are Paul’s last known words here in this chapter. So these are Paul’s heaviest words to Timothy and by extension to all of us in the church age. Preachers invariably go straight for the substance of the charge, “Preach the word,” “be prepared,” and “correct, rebuke and encourage,” and thereby miss what to me is the weightiest part of the verse. It’s the phrase, “in view of his appearing and his kingdom” (as in the NIV). The Today’s English Version has it, “*because of his coming and his Kingdom.*” Most English translations simply say, “and *by his appearing...*”

Admittedly, the verse is difficult to bring into English. The Greek has “I charge...” first in the sentence, because that’s the emphasis. It’s like a legal demand. The NASB has, “I solemnly charge you” at the beginning of the verse. The “you” is not there in the text; Paul’s charge is clearly to Timothy, but it has universal application. The NIV’s “in view of,” or the TEV’s “because of” or other translations’ “by” have been added by the translators to make sense; they’re not there in the Greek text either. The “and” indicates that the phrase about the Return and the Kingdom are there to add solemnity to the charge Paul is making; the appearing and kingdom phrase is NOT there to qualify when Christ will judge the living and the dead, as some translations have it. So, the charge Paul is making is extremely serious for two reasons: because he’s making it in the very presence of Christ, and because the Return of Christ and the Kingdom are necessarily in view.

I think the NIV’s translation captures perfectly what Paul is writing, which is this: There is nothing more important to motivate anyone than the awareness that Christ is going to return in glory and establish the promised Millennial Kingdom. It’s evidently what motivated Paul, for it’s the most important truth Paul can call upon to motivate Timothy, *viz*, that Christ will Return and there’s going to be a literal glorious Kingdom on earth. Timothy, and we today, are to live not just reacting to what’s going on in the world around us, but are to be governed by the coming Day of the Lord.

I’m certain that this is what Paul is saying here, for his mind stays on the subject of Christ’s return; a few verses later he writes: **“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing”** (2 Timothy 4:8, NIV). Paul’s great motive for his life of service to Christ is the fact that Christ is one day going to come back in overwhelming power and glory and rule as King over the whole earth. And Paul writes this so that it will be the motivation and desire that drives Timothy and all of us as well.

Sadly, most of us in the church today live our lives with little regard for the Return of Christ. We know we’re going to be in heaven some day, thanks to what Christ did for us on the cross, and that, for us, is a sufficient view of the future. So we live entirely in the present. The past is over with, just something to remember. The future is abstract and indefinite. We live exclusively in the present. But what’s tragic isn’t so much our present-ness but that we’ve dismissed totally from our minds the greatest moment in the entire biblical story, when Christ returns to earth. The Book of Revelation is given over to that moment; it’s the climax that occurs in Chapter 19. It is a moment so glorious that the Spirit told us about it through the prophet Zechariah, whose book climaxes with the coming of Christ in glory in Chapters 9, and 12 to 14.

The Return of Christ is the greatest event in all history. It’s when God comes down from heaven in majesty and splendor to dwell here on earth with His beloved creatures. It reprises what was supposed to happen in the Garden in Genesis’ opening chapters, but couldn’t and didn’t because of the entry of sin. It’s the repeatedly promised seventh-day “rest.” It’s the resolution of the curses pronounced in Genesis 3. It’s the fulfillment of all the promises given to Abraham and to the Nation of Israel, and to all the Gentile nations. The Return of Christ is when rewards will be distributed to all God’s servants for their faithfulness. It’s when all the animals on earth will experience creation peace. And when all humans will enjoy not only peace but the absence of Satanic temptation to sin. It’s when at last all the Gentile nations on earth will know and worship and serve God. It’s when there’ll be no more hatred, cruelty, violence, lies, poverty, wars, or natural disasters. It’s when God at last will see righteousness and the knowledge of God filling the world that He created to glorify Himself. It’s what God is intently looking forward to, and we should as well.

In the first two chapters of the Book of Job, the Spirit permits a brief glimpse into the heavenly throne-room where we observe something astounding. Politicking at a cosmic level with eternal consequences for all humanity seems to be going on there. (Surely the text intends more than the story of this person, Job.) Satan and God have their differing agendas and, although God’s isn’t explicit in this text, I imagine their respective positions would be evident from this dialogue that I imagine took place. Satan: “I will rule the world, and all humans want me to rule because I allow them to live however they please. You place obligations on them.” God: “You do not have the right to rule. I do. And I will rule.” And they each have their strategies to achieve their political goals. All history, I suggest, is the outworking of this great political contest, Who shall rule the world? Who has the *right* to rule?

We're currently witnessing events that are necessary preparations for Christ to return. All that is happening in the world is exactly according to pre-determined plan, the concurring hope-filled plans of Satan and God's eternal and sovereign purpose. Let's think: In America, why was there (and still is) such intense hatred for Donald Trump, for his policies and for his supporters? Why are we now seeing godless people aggressively taking control of almost all our institutions? Why so many lies and deceptions in the media? Pundits and intellectuals would shriek at this severely reductionist view of politics I offer here, but it makes biblical sense: All current, secular-driven politics can, in one way or another, be ultimately reduced to this, the empowerment of Satan. And more ultimately, it's to remove the knowledge of God, the God of Israel, from planet Earth. So that Satan can rule unrestrained.

Satan knows what we don't know (but we should). It's this, God's presence on earth is mediate. That means that God can be known by His Word and/or by his people who live out His Word. God's existence, His personal attributes, His will, His love, His work, His righteousness, all these are known through the agency of His Word and/or His people who express it, by His people who represent Him. So His presence is a *mediated* presence. That's why the "image of God."

The Jews bear testimony to the existence and knowledge of God even though at present they're in rebellion to Him. They are His people, and nothing can change that, not even their disobedience. The Nation of Israel isn't just another of many nation-states on earth. It's unique because it's a nation of those who by their very existence necessarily represent the living God.

And thus the Church is a "kingdom of priests," because we reveal by our lives the existence and knowledge of God. This is why knowing God's Word and obedience to it is supremely necessary for all Christians. For this reason the Church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, to empower it to represent the living God in a way that Israel couldn't.

Satan's goal, which he relentlessly pursues, is a totally God-less world, a world totally devoid of the knowledge of God, because that way he wins. He knows the Church will be removed from the world in what we call the Rapture. That leaves only the Jews and the Nation of Israel. His strategy therefore is to isolate and annihilate all Jews. That means there'd be no people for Christ to return to, so there could be no Return and no Kingdom, and it means there'd be no more knowledge of God on earth. (As far as the existence of Bibles is concerned, Satan could concoct some deceitful narrative that renders Bibles innocuous, as has already been happening with his phony billions of years and evolution and with his so-called higher criticism.) If Christ cannot return, Satan remains in control of the world, permanently.

For the Nation of Israel to be isolated and existentially threatened, America must cease to be her ally and defender. This explains what's going on politically and culturally in America today. Our nation must no longer be the world power that it is, and those currently in control of our nation will make that happen. Marxists and other elites, radicals all, who currently lead the Democrat Party despise America because of its "bourgeois" values, its religious superstitions (ie, Christianity), its free market economy and its repudiation of their progressive vision. So they seek either our nation's annihilation or a revolution that eradicates all that America has traditionally valued and/or represented. The daily news media document these efforts. And those who lead the Democrat Party have no love for Israel and not only couldn't care if it ceased to exist, they'd probably rejoice. Although Satan may be the ultimate power responsible for the decline of America, let's remember that it's God who sovereignly wills these end-time events to occur.

When the Church is removed from the world and Israel is isolated and defenseless, the prophecies of Zechariah and Revelation will be fulfilled. There will be unspeakably horrible judgments upon a rebellious people on earth. The anti-Christ will be revealed; he will have awesome supernatural powers, and he will seek to totally annihilate all Jews from earth, a reprise of what Haman tried to do (Book of Esther). And in their severe distress, Israel then will call out to Jesus to save them, and He will. That will be the climax of history, when Christ returns to save His people Israel and to establish the promised Kingdom. And to rule.

This climactic future event was Paul's great desire. He wanted it because it's what God wants, and it's what Timothy and the Church should want. We need to understand current events in light of it. More important, we need to live our lives, now, in light of it. But, how or in what way does the way we today live relate to the Return of Christ and His Kingdom? What's the connection? Is Paul making a threat here? That's possible, for our participation in the Day of the Lord may be a reward for faithfulness in this life, as we've discussed in other Sunday School lessons. But there's something else . . .

The Church Age is proleptic of the future Day of the Lord. Our lives today, what we do and our personal character, are to glorify our Savior, with whom we're in union. All that we do and all that we are is to reveal His glory, to express the perfections of His beautiful Person. As He will be astounding in glory at His appearing, we're to strive to be like that now. We're not here to live as we please counting on what Jesus did for us on the cross to get us into heaven when we die. Rather, we're here to live in such a way as to be like the One whose coming will be as glorious as the sun is dazzlingly bright, and whose Kingdom will be as filled with righteousness as the waters cover the seas. We're here to live *now* under the rule of the coming Ruler, the *LORD* Jesus.

Let's conclude. God is carrying out a great project, one that transcends all time. It involves all the nations on earth throughout all history, affecting every people group, every tribe and every person. It deals with good and evil, and truth and justice. It deals with the entire world of nature. It deals with relationships that transcend even the bond of death. And in this verse, speaking thru His servant Paul, God adjures you and me, everyone in the Church, to join Him in carrying out this great world-transforming and life-transforming mission. This isn't a request or a recommendation. God has put us under solemn obligation. We dare not say No.