

## Glory

With great solemnity Paul writes, **“In view of [Christ’s] appearing and his kingdom . . . Preach the Word”** (2 Timothy 4:1-2). Why are these two ideas connected? The time that Paul referred to in this verse, the Return of Christ, is imminent; Christ’s Return has never been as near as right now. So let’s think about this puzzling (to us) but probably essential connection that Paul makes here.

For years Timothy was closely associated with Paul, so Timothy surely understood why Paul connected knowing God’s revelation in the Scriptures with the Return of Christ. But that’s lost to us today. So what we need to do is try to put the two ideas together on the basis of teachings elsewhere in the canon. But first, we need to understand who Paul is concerned about here. Are they people *in* the Church, or those outside?

Timothy was in Ephesus. He was evangelizing the people there. And of course he would have been discipling the believers there. It’s possible Paul is urging Timothy to preach the Gospel with great urgency because the end of the age was near. For us today, that would hold. Never before in this Church Age has the need to reach out to people been more urgent than right now. There isn’t much time left to bring people to Christ. But I don’t think that’s what Paul has in mind, because Paul does not say “soon.” He does not write, “In view of Christ’s soon return. . .” What Paul has in mind is the fact *that* Christ is returning. And the Return is a time of judgment. Note that, in verse 1, Paul is thinking of Christ as “the judge of the living and the dead.”

The “Word” that Paul refers to in this passage is of course the Old Testament. The O.T. Scriptures mostly had to do with how Israelites were to live. I believe that’s why Paul instructed Timothy to preach the Scriptures. Paul’s burden here is the same as that of the writing prophets of the O.T., the people of Israel were not living according to God’s revealed will for them. And it’s no different for the people of God in the Church Age.

It’s highly likely that Paul knew that, in time, believers wouldn’t grow in the faith as they should. Paul’s references in this passage to “correct, rebuke and encourage” and to “sound doctrine” suggest that Paul’s concern is those who are *in* the Church. They are in the Church because they believe in Christ. But something else is wrong with them. And it’s serious enough for Paul to make an issue of it in these last words of his to Timothy. The believers may not have been ready to stand before the Judge.

Salvation is not merely a mental attitude, an assent to or an agreement with who Christ is and what He did. If so, there’d be no need for Paul to have this concern! If that were all that was necessary, it wouldn’t matter whether believers held to sound theology or not, nor whether they ran after false teachings about this or that. As long as they “believed in Jesus,” what would anything else matter? Well, obviously, it *does* matter, because we fail to understand what believing in Jesus entails.

Paul knew that in time, as we got closer and closer to the time for Christ to return and establish the promised Millennial kingdom, people in the Church would be indifferent to that Return. They would be indifferent to theology, and indifferent to what the Bible teaches. Paul probably is not referring here to the great heresies of the Church, which were dealt with by the early Church and the church Fathers. More likely, he’s referring to people abandoning a life that expresses biblical truths and adopting instead a worldview and lifestyle that either ignores God or is totally alien to God. Because of our innate sin nature and a host of demons all arrayed against us, we will be just like the Israelites. We will drift into idolatry, into worldliness, and into secular pursuits. It has to happen because the Church is embedded in a pagan culture, and each believer is surrounded by ungodly influences. In Paul’s mind, the remedy for this is to remind people what the Scriptures say. What they do with the Word is their responsibility, and they’ll be judged for it.

So. Why the connection between the Return of Christ and our living the Scriptures? Possibly because how we live determines whether we participate in the millennial Kingdom! If we aren’t living the biblical Christian life, it may be that we forfeit being in the Kingdom. Although it’s not explicit in the Bible (but there are texts that suggest this is so), participation in the Kingdom may be the reward that’s offered to the believer who takes seriously and fulfills the responsibilities that come with salvation.

The great expectation at the time of Paul’s writing was the Return of Christ and the Millennial Kingdom. Paul probably expected to die before that came. But perhaps, he thought, Timothy and those in the church at Ephesus would experience the Return. And so what was necessary—*absolutely necessary*—was for Christians to be as mature and as

perfect as they possibly could be to welcome Him. Christians must be ready for Christ's Return (Mark 13). Several of Jesus' parables developed that point. Yes, Paul knew also that there would be a Rapture. But either way – by way of Rapture or His physical Return – Christians had to be prepared. For what? To give an account to the One who, at His Return, judges the living and the dead.

"Preach the Word" was, of course, an exhortation for Timothy. But for us, readers of this Letter, Paul's exhortation is to read and know the Word. In Paul and Timothy's day, very few believers had copies of the Scriptures. Followers of Christ learned God's Word by hearing it read/taught/preached. We today however all have our own Bibles. The responsibility in these verses therefore is ours. We need to know and live the Word (see Hebrews 12:25). So we could probably loosely paraphrase Paul's words something like this: "We are going to be in the presence of the Judge, therefore do everything that is necessary to be ready for that, so you're fully in God's will as it is revealed in the Word."

And how does that happen? How do we prepare, get ready? By living out all that the Word of God prescribes. We do that in three steps: (1) By knowing the Word; that requires much, much time spent in Bible study. (2) Then by thinking clearly on how we should express that Word in our life. That requires discernment as well as understanding the world we live in. And then (3) by obeying the Word as we understand it should be lived in today's world. Doing the 1<sup>st</sup> and especially the 2<sup>nd</sup> steps would be radically new and different for almost all believers in our nation. This 3<sup>rd</sup> step requires a commitment to Christ unlike anything most believers in America ever have known.

My deep concern is that most believers in America, even in evangelical churches, have no concept of the imminence of either the Rapture or of the Return. Nor of having to die and appear before Christ at the *bema* judgment. Nor, for that matter, of having *any* responsibility for how they live. So there's no interest (let alone urgency) to "be prepared."

But I suspect there's something more here. Let's not be deceived. There is no more wonderful Person in all existence than the beautiful Person of Christ. And there is nothing greater in life than to live for Christ. And so we come now to the point of all this discussion, what I see as the deep meaning of these verses in 2 Timothy 4. The greatest moment in all history is when the exalted, victorious Christ returns to earth. There is no greater reality in all history than His Return. It will be more glorious than anything we can imagine. Everything in history – *everything* – leads up to this moment when Christ will return and set up the promised Kingdom. The Son is in heaven waiting for this day to come. And the Father wants this day to come, the Day of the Lord. It's the Day of the promised Rest, when all creation will be at peace. When Satan and his hideous demons will no longer be free to commit evil. When the animals will be at peace, the curse on the ground will be removed, and righteousness will pervade all God's creation. Paul wants this day to come too. But more important is that we followers of Christ not only also should want it, but that we are *living for it!* We are to live *today* in such a way, a way that God has revealed in the Scriptures, that anticipates the soon-coming, glorious Day of the Lord.

The ineffable Day that is coming will reveal to all earth the transcendent and surpassing glory of the risen Christ. In joyous and grateful anticipation of that Day, we reveal the Lord Jesus, who dwells in us thru His Spirit, by how we live today. We don't obey the will of God merely to honor Him – although that we certainly do (or should do) – but to reveal to the world His perfections and loveliness. After all, when He returns, in splendor and glory, we will be with Him in transcending glory, having been exalted to be just like Him. On that Day, we will reflect His surpassing glory, reflect His holiness and love and truth and beauty! May our lives *today* reflect His surpassing glory.

The Millennial Kingdom is not Christ's reward for all that He suffered to make atonement for sin. Ruling as King is His service to His beloved people Israel and to the Gentile nations of earth. What then is His reward? It's *people* (Isaiah 53:10-12). It's people who trust Him, who love Him and honor Him by obeying and serving Him as He commanded. It's people who glorify Him by willingly and lovingly repenting of their former self-centered lives and instead becoming like Him, doing what He did when He was here, inviting people into the Kingdom. When Christ returns, His reward will be with Him. Us! Paul wants us to be a reward that is fitting for the King of kings, for the Creator and sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth. But being with Christ and participating in the Millennial Kingdom is *our* reward.

We're called into an intimate, loving relationship with the living Creator God. We meet Him in His revelation, the Word of God. And we meet Him in prayer. We enjoy Him and the blessings He lovingly bestows when we obey Him and serve Him. He will glorify us as we glorify Him.