



Sermon Transcript November 3, 2019

We Believe! A Glorious Return Titus 2:11-15

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 3, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Scripture Text

Titus 2:11-15

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. ¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority, Let no one disregard you.

Introduction

As we continue to work our way through the doctrinal statement for the EFCA, we confess this morning what we believe regarding the future return of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus is coming back. When the disciples were watching Jesus ascend into heaven, two angels stood beside them and said, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

And so, this is what we believe: “We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.”

This statement tells us something about the Christian view of history. It is linear. We believe that all of human history is moving to a point of climax when Jesus comes again and transforms this broken world. In fact, that is one way to summarize the entire story of the Bible. “The Bible makes it clear that God has a unified plan for all of history. (We often like to say that history is “his-story.”) His ultimate purpose, a plan for the fullness of time, is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.”¹ It is the ultimate answer to what we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, *“your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* All of this comes together at the return of Christ.

This linear view of history is something that resonates with the Western secular mind. It is how our secular culture views history as well. The secular view of history is that we are making progress. Mark Sayers says that the prevailing belief is that as we “progress in time, we will also advance scientifically, technologically, politically, and morally.”² Just think of all the scientific and technological advances made just in our lifetime. This view of history is a view that believes man is progressing and man is getting better. Sayers goes on to say, that this view of history holds out the prospect “that with the right conditions and influences, humans are perfectible and that a kind of human utopia is possible.”³

Now there is a difference of opinion in our secular culture as to what those “right conditions and influences” are to bring us into this preferred future. The “progressive” believes that more government intervention is needed to bring about this preferred future. Conservatives, on the other hand, believe that it is the free

market that will lead us to this preferred future. These two roads are very different from each other and they describe some of the political and social tension we feel in our culture today. And yet, as polar opposite these influences have become, they hold something in common. “They both assume that specific policies can lead us to a free, fair, and prosperous future.”⁴ Both believe that history is all about progress.

And yet, how much progress have we really made? There were several news outlets this past week that called attention to all the current protests taking place around the world. The headline that first grabbed my attention sounded the alarm and read like this: “A world on fire: Here are all the major protests happening around the globe right now.”⁵ So much for progress. One news outlet introduced the topic by saying, “Protests have erupted around the world over the past few months, with hundreds of thousands of people from the Middle East, to Asia, South America and the Caribbean calling for change.”⁶ Chile, Lebanon, Catalonia, Iraq, Pakistan and Hong Kong were all highlighted in this article. The common cause for these uprisings was tied to injustice or social inequity (government and economics). The two forces our culture sees as the answer are failing the people they serve.

We are not against good governance. We are not against good economic policy. We are not against “making progress.” In fact, this longing for progress and this preferred future—whether or not a person can define what that future ought to be — speaks to the common admission that something is wrong with this world and we long for it to be made right. The nagging question underlying this conversation goes like this: “Will things in our troubled world every get any better? Is it just going to continue to get worse and worse or will there be an end to all the war, to the hostility and the inequity and the crime and the chaos?” The Christian answer is a resounding, “Yes!” It is going to get better. It is going to be better, there is no question about it.⁷ But it is tied to the glorious return of our Lord Jesus.

This is why Paul says in Titus 2:13 that in this present age, we are “*waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” In our doctrinal statement, we confess belief in “the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is what I want us to ponder this morning. Here is the question I want to ask you this morning. “What is so glorious about the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ?” What is it about the return of Jesus that causes John to cry out at the end of Revelation—the very end of the Bible—“*Come Lord Jesus.*”?

Jesus Comes in Glory

The first thing that is truly glorious about the glorious return of Jesus Christ is that when Jesus comes again he will come in glory. We are waiting for *“the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

That word *“appearing”* is an interesting word. The Greek word is *epiphaneia*. The English word we get from this word is “epiphany.” Literally this word means “the appearance of something that was previously hidden or invisible to us.”⁸ For example, it could be used to describe the appearing of the sun at daybreak as it leaps over the horizon. What was concealed can now be clearly seen.

What is interesting about Paul’s use of this word in our passage this morning is that he uses it two times. In verse 11 he says, *“For the grace of God has appeared.”* In this verse, the word is in the past tense and speaks to something that has already happened. In the past, like the sun coming up over the horizon, God has made visible his grace to us. But then in verse 13 he speaks of an *“appearing”* that is yet to happen. And in this case, it is the glory of Christ that will be made visible.

Now you don’t have to work very hard to know what Paul is referring to here when he talks about these two “epiphanies.” They both refer to Jesus. The first “epiphany” when God disclosed his grace to us took place when Jesus came the first time. Jesus, the eternal Son of God steps into human history by concealing his glory when he was born of a woman and became a man. Have you ever seen the TV show “Undercover Boss?” In this show, the boss of a company conceals his or her identity and takes on the role of an average worker to learn about what really goes on in his or her company. The people the boss interacts with have no idea who it is that is working alongside of them. The boss’s identity in large measure has been hidden from them. To some degree, that is what Jesus did in his first appearing. When you looked at him, he didn’t look any different than anyone else. They didn’t know they were interacting with “the boss” - the God and the Creator of the universe. His glory was concealed and hidden.

Now it is not to say that from time to time his glory didn’t shine through. His miracles pointed to his glory. When he calmed the storm, the disciples said among themselves *“Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him.”* Three of the disciples were with Jesus when he was transfigured before them where *“his clothes became radiant, intensely white.”* Of course, the glory of Jesus is seen in his

resurrection from the dead. But even in these incidents, the full glory of Jesus is concealed. Rather, it was the grace of God that appeared in that first “epiphany” of Jesus. It was here that “*our great God*” became our Savior. He died for us on the cross. He took upon himself the judgment for our sin. And so in his first appearing to us, God was disclosing his incredible grace. Whoever repents of their sin and turns in faith to Jesus who died for them can know the forgiveness and the love that comes from God. This is why Paul says what he says of this first “epiphany” in verse 11, “*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.*”

But there is coming a day when there will be an “epiphany”- an appearing of the glory of Christ. On that day the veil will be lifted and the world will see Jesus in all of his glory. John says it this way in 1 John 3:2, “*we shall see him as he is.*”

The English word *epiphany* can refer to “an Aha! moment.” It is that moment you discover something you didn’t know before. When Jesus returns, it will be the ultimate “Aha! moment.” It will be an “Aha! moment” for us as believers. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:9 that right now “*we know in part.*” Yes, we believe in the absolute glory of Jesus Christ. But we don’t come close to fully grasping how glorious Jesus really is. But then Paul says in the next verse, “*but when the perfect comes [Jesus] the partial will pass away . . . For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.*” You get a hint of this from the Scriptures whenever someone like Ezekiel or John in the book of Revelation try to describe what they saw of their heavenly vision of Christ. They can’t adequately put into words what they saw. The word they use over and over again is the word “*like*.” It was “*like*” this or “*like*” that. But this I do know. For the believer, the glory of Jesus will cause us to delight in his beauty and we will never tire of singing and delighting in him. That is why David said in Psalm 27 that his one desire in life is “*that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life; to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.*”

This future appearing of the glory of Jesus will also be an epiphany to the unbelieving world. One thing I know is that this “Aha! moment” will be like an involuntary reflex and the whole world—the seen and the unseen world—will fall to their knees. We see this kind of reaction from demons who encounter Jesus when his glory was disclosed to us in his first appearance. How much more so, when Jesus appears in glory. Jesus says in Matthew 24:30, “*At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.*” The “Aha! moment” for the world on this day will be “*that Jesus Christ is Lord!*” That is what is

so glorious about the glorious return of Jesus. He will come in glory and all the world will see him for who he is, namely: “*our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

Jesus Brings Salvation

There is a second thing that makes the glorious return of Jesus so glorious. When Paul thinks about the future “*appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*” he refers to it as our “*blessed hope.*” This begs the question, “What do we mean by hope?” What is Christian hope?

Often when we use the word “hope” we use it to express a desire we have but there is a measure of uncertainty as to what will really happen. For example, I might say, “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow.” Here the word “hope” expresses my desire but I am uncertain what will unfold tomorrow with the weather. I don’t want it to rain, but it just might rain. That is not the way the word *hope* is used when we talk about the “*blessed hope*” we have in the return of Jesus.

Christian hope, our *blessed hope*, is anchored in the resurrected Jesus and so it is certain. This is why Peter refers to our hope in 1 Peter 1:3 as our “*living hope.*” It is anchored in the resurrected Jesus who has already conquered sin and the grave. Consequently, the glorious return of Christ is so certain on the mind of the New Testament writers that James Boice observes that “In the New Testament one verse in twenty-five deals with the Lord’s return. It is mentioned 318 times in 260 chapters.”⁹ The New Testament writers speak of our “*blessed hope*” as our sure and certain hope.

The reason the return of Jesus is a “*blessed hope*” is because it marks the day when Jesus completes the work that he has already started in us. James Boice says that there is a clear difference between the secular view of utopia and the Christian view of utopia. The secular view is wishful thinking, nothing more than expressing what one would like to see happen. But the biblical view of utopia “is something that has already happened but which is also to happen more fully when Christ returns.”¹⁰ We see that in our passage this morning. At the first “epiphany” - the first *appearing* of Christ salvation has already come. It is already here. And yet, there is something more to come. Paul captures this “already and not yet” mindset of our salvation when he says in Philippians 1:6, “*He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*” That phrase “*the day of Jesus Christ*” is often referred to in the Old and New Testament as “*the day of the Lord.*” Listen to what

Jesus said of this day. In Matthew 25:31-32 he said, “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*” To those who belong to Christ, they will inherit their eternal reward. That is our “*blessed hope.*” We will forever be with the Lord.

There is a sobering aspect about the coming day of the Lord that I must mention. It is also a day of judgment. Boice says it this way; “History has an end, and its end involves accountability.”¹¹ Someday we will stand before God and have to give an account for our lives. And if we stand on our own, we will be condemned. The Old Testament prophet speaks of the coming day of the Lord in Isaiah 2 and he describes it as a day when the pride of man will be laid low. It is a pride that says, “I don’t need God.” It is a pride that resides in the heart of man who wants to determine for himself what is right and what is wrong. And on this day, the day of the Lord, the prophet says, “*The day is coming when your pride will be brought low and the LORD alone will be exalted.*”

You know, for all the talk of making progress through history, when I read the Bible I am forced to agree with what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes; truly there really is “*nothing new under the sun.*” When Jeroboam II was king over the northern kingdom of Israel, he reigned 41 years. He experienced great prosperity. But prosperity led to pride and he forgot God. During this time of prosperity, a prophet by the name of Amos came to Jeroboam II and he spoke about the coming day of the Lord. Willem Vangemeren summarizes the message of the prophet this way, “In the day of the Lord, God confronts the systems of the world. The leaders may secure political alliances, economic systems of checks and balances, international trade, technology, and religious values, but on the day of accountability, all human values will be brought down, and only the Lord will be exalted as the great King.”¹² And so the message of Amos over and over again in Amos 5 is this, “*Seek the LORD and live.*” Our only hope is to repent of our sin and turn in faith to Jesus. This is what makes the glorious return so glorious. Jesus comes to receive unto himself those who belong to him and we will be with him forever. This is our *blessed hope.*

We Will Be Like Him

There is one more thing I want to highlight as we consider the glorious return of Jesus. When he returns the work of transformation in our lives will be complete and

we will be like Jesus. That is what John says in 1 John 3:2. He says, “*when he appears we shall be like him.*” James Boice helps us understand what John is saying here. He is not saying that will become “god.” Rather, he is saying that we no longer sin, our knowledge will no longer be peppered with error and we will fully love the way we ought to love.¹³ Won’t that be great! There will no longer be a need to pray “Father, forgive me.” There will no longer be the difficulty of loving one another. We will be what we were meant to be when God created us in his image.

What is interesting about this glorious picture of the return of Christ is that the process of transformation has already begun in our lives. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that we are currently being transformed *from one degree of glory to another*. So we are growing in holiness. We are growing in knowledge. We are growing in love. And it is *our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ* that Paul uses to motivate us to live for Christ. We say in our statement of faith that the return of Christ “motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.”

It is no accident that Paul talks about the *glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ* in the context where he is exhorting us *to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*. In fact, this command is sandwiched between these two epiphanies of Christ and it teaches us how to live as we wait. John Stott said we are being asked to do spiritually what is impossible to do physically. We are being asked to look in opposite directions at the same time. Daily we should look back at the first epiphany and remind ourselves that through the cross—the grace of God—we have been set free from our sin. At the same time, we look ahead and anticipate the epiphany of the appearing of the glory of Christ. Everyday, we should remind ourselves, “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ is coming again.”¹⁴ This is what leads us to grow in holiness, knowledge and love. Or as John puts it in 1 John 3:3, “*Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure.*”

If you think about it, when we come to the Lord’s Table we are being asked to look in both directions at the same time. We come and receive the elements that remind us of the first epiphany when the grace of God was disclosed to us in Jesus. Through his body and his blood, he died for us. Make sure when you come to this table, you look back and remember what Christ has done for you. At the same time, we are told to continually come to this table which proclaims the Lord’s death and then Paul says, “*until he comes.*”

This table gives us a taste of what is yet to come. Right now we fellowship with Jesus through eyes of faith. Someday, we will be with him forever. It says in Revelation of that day, that the dwelling of God will be with man. That is what makes the glorious return of Jesus so glorious. Everything we receive by faith, will be made sight and we will be forever changed.

Conclusion

The glorious return of Jesus is truly glorious! He comes in glory and we will forever be captivated by his beauty and majesty. Our salvation will be complete. And will finally be what we were meant to be. We will be like him.

This morning we are going to invite you to come to the table. Why? It is a picture of what is needed to enjoy all that we have talked about this morning. It requires us to “come” to Jesus by faith. Before you come, look both ways. Look back and see the cross. “The body of Christ for you. The blood of Christ for you.” Look forward and see the coming return of Christ. We proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. And then let that motivate you to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission until he takes you to be with him.

Even so come Lord Jesus!

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- ¹“Overview of the Bible: A Survey of The History of Salvation” in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008)
- ²Mark Sayers *Reappearing Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2019) 20
- ³*Ibid.*, 20
- ⁴*Ibid.*, 21
- ⁵Allana Akhtar and Julianna Kaplan “A world on fire: Here are all the major protests happening around the globe right now.” www.businessinsider.com Oct. 22, 2019
- ⁶Zena Chamis “Protests are erupting around the world, but what’s sparking them?” www.abc.net.au Oct. 29, 2019
- ⁷John MacArthur “The Glorious Return Of Jesus Christ, Part 1” sermon on www.gty.org August 28, 1994
- ⁸John Stott *Guard the Truth* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996) 194
- ⁹James Boice *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove IVP, 1986) 705
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, 677
- ¹¹*Ibid.*, 712
- ¹²Willem Vangemeren *The Progress of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988) 451
- ¹³Boice, 719
- ¹⁴Stott, 196

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Can you think of a time you had an “Aha! moment?” What was it like to discover something you didn’t know before?
2. What observations do you have of our statement of faith for this week? See page 3.
3. What do you think it looks like to “live with constant expectancy” of the return of Jesus? What causes you to lose sight of this glorious truth?

Diving Into The Word

4. Read Titus 2:11-15. Spend some time comparing and contrasting the “two appearances” (epiphanies) of Jesus in this passage. What do you learn about Jesus I in these verses?
5. Read in this order Ezekiel 1:26-28; Revelation 1:9-20; Psalm 27:4. Spend some time contemplating the glory of Christ. What do you think it will be like to see “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ?” (You might even want to stop right now and do what you see the host of heaven doing—worship him!)
6. Read Matthew 25:31-46. How should the glorious return of Jesus move us to “energetic mission.” How does it move you personally? How should it move us as a church?
7. Read Titus 2:11-15. Coming back to this passage, discuss how the cross and the return of Jesus both motivate us towards godly living. How can you make sure you “look both ways” this week?

Taking It Home

8. Share one thought you are taking from this conversation and one thing you want to do in light of your conversation.