#### **Message Notes 2-4-2024 – The Return of the King**

It was just over 20 years ago, back in December of 2003 that a movie was released that won best picture. Does anyone want to guess? It was *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. The LOTR movies, and the books that they were based on, were, and still are, very popular today. A couple of my roommates in college knew the LOTR books inside and out.

And this story, *The Return of the King*, was the culmination of a very long drama that is the Lord of the Rings. J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of the books, wrote an elaborate history for this fantasy story. And in many ways, the drama moves to its conclusion when the king returns in power to rule and reign and right the wrongs that had happened.

There are of course, many other things going on in this story which most viewers find quite exciting. Although, there are many people like Kara, who are able to sleep quite peacefully through this tale.

Now like most good stories, *The Return of the King* is powerful because it has biblical parallels. All the best stories are echoes in some ways of the true story, which we find in God’s Book. This film brings to a climax good and evil, light and darkness – and in the end, good triumphs and evil is vanquished.

And like King Aragorn from the story who returns to reign as King and set things right, there is a King who is truly returning to earth. This King will come suddenly and will swiftly defeat all evil. And this King, of course, is Jesus Christ.

Friends, we have been taking a journey exploring what I believe are the essential beliefs that all Christians should hold in order to truly be Christians. Anyone can say that they are a Christian, but it is truly holding these core beliefs that demonstrates someone to truly be a Christian. This is my list. Others may come up with very similar lists. My list includes the following:

1. The authority of Scripture as God’s Book, enabling us to know Him and follow Him.
2. That God is our Creator and we are made in His image
3. The unique birth and life of Jesus Christ
4. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ
5. The resurrection of Jesus Christ
6. The Person and work of the Holy Spirit
7. The Church as God’s instrument of salt and light in the world
8. The Return of the King

Our final essential of the faith is that Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will return to earth. And when He does, it will be a great day for His followers and a terrible day for those that reject Him.

Christians from very early on had questions about the details of Jesus’ return. One of those Christian communities that had many questions were those from Thessalonica. In fact, in each of the five chapters in 1 Thessalonians there is a reference to the return of Jesus.

But before we dive into the biblical text, it would be helpful to give a quick summary to the why this book came about. When you read the Book of Acts, we read of Paul the Apostles missionary journeys. On one of those journeys, Paul and his partner in ministry at the time, Silas, came to the Greek city of Thessalonica.

And here is what we read in Acts 17:1-10

**1 When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. 4Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.**

**5But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+17%3A1-10&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27529a)**] 6But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” 8When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. 9Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.**

**10As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.**

It appears that Paul was there for about 3 weeks. He went to the synagogue and shared the good news with the Jews of the city and proved that Jesus must be the Messiah. And some of the Jews believed and also some of the Greeks put their trust in Jesus as well.

But sadly, some Jews became jealous and stirred up the crowds against Paul and the Christians there. Persecution was breaking out and Paul and Silas were sent out of the city by the believers at night for their own protection.

And so to the occasion for this letter from Paul to the church. Some time has passed and Paul had sent Timothy to check in on the believers of Thessalonica. But despite the persecution, the believers were staying strong in their faith in Jesus and the church was continuing to grow.

But challenges remained. And one of those challenges is that some of the Christians had passed away and the believers were concerned that these believers that had died would miss out when Jesus returns to earth.

And so a major theme of Paul’s letter is that Jesus will indeed return and all those that have trusted in Him will share in His victory, no matter if they have died or were still living.

Please turn with me now to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

**1 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.**

**4But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. 7For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**

So what is going on here? Paul is telling the church to not be concerned about dates and times, but to know that the Day of the Lord will come and it will come suddenly. Paul does not want them to be focused on the details of when exactly He will come. Instead, he encourages them to simply continue encouraging one another and building one another up in their faith.

In other words, they were called to focus on living daily for Jesus, rather than when and how Jesus will return.

One of the words that Paul uses to describe the return of Jesus the King is ‘the Day of the Lord.’ This is a phrase that is also found in several places in the Old Testament. It describes God’s sudden bringing about of judgment and vindication of His people.

In verse 5 Paul tells these believers, **You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.** To be a child of the day is one way of saying that for these believers the Day of the Lord would be a day of joy and celebration and vindication.

It is clear from several places that when Jesus returns, He will set things right in the world. All the believers in Thessalonica would share in the celebration of welcoming Jesus back to earth.

And being grounded in the truth of Jesus’ return, the believers were called to be people of hope in the present. They were called to godliness and holiness. They were to continue rejecting the idols and the sexual immorality that were all around them and instead to chose faithfulness to Christ.

Friends, as we continue this text from Paul’s letter, what is the big takeaway for us today?

I believe that it is this. The Lord calls us to not only have certainty that Jesus will return and all believers will share in His victory over evil, but also to choose to live as people of The Day until then.

Like the believers in Thessalonica in the 1st century, we live in a culture that is sadly largely anti-Christian today. Standing on the truth of the Bible can get you in trouble in America, like in many other places in the world. In fact, the government has been told to track those that are purchasing bibles as being people that would be considered extremists. And many churches have chosen to go with whatever the culture says is right or wrong, rather than submitting to the authority of God’s Word on various issues.

Like the believers in Thessalonica, I believe that Paul’s words continue to instruct us to be fully convinced that Jesus will indeed come to earth and when He does, He will set everything right. We are to be people of confident hope that in the end all will be well for those that chose loyalty to Jesus, no matter what.

 And in the meanwhile, we are to live as people of The Day, encouraging one another and building one another up in our walk with the Lord.

I admit that Christians do hold different views as to the specifics on what exactly Jesus’ return will look like. I do not view that as an essential of the faith. You may have heard words like premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. People speak about a rapture and a tribulation and various other ideas that are often viewed in connection with the return of Jesus.

I believe that Christians are called to search the scriptures and lovingly and gently discuss these things together. In time, I would like to share with you how I understand what the Bible teaches on greater detail.

But today, I would like to emphasize that ALL CHRISTIANS are called to stand together with confident hope that Jesus the King will return and He will judge the world with fairness. And not only this, we as the children of The Day, those that have chosen to follow Him, we will be with Him forever. The best is yet to be.

Our world today is still very, very broken. Injustice and corruption continues to abound and God’s people continue to be often mistreated. In God’s patience, the Lord continues to give time for people to turn from their sins and turn to Him. God, in His goodness, does not want anyone to parish.

But Jesus is indeed the true Emperor of the world. And He will indeed come. Those choosing to reject Jesus and God’s way will be caught by surprise and brought into judgement and those loyal to Jesus will celebrate meeting our Lord and welcoming Him back to earth.

Understanding the end of the story helps greatly in living out our place within it. And so we are to be people of hope who stand on the truth that Jesus, our King, will come. But until He comes or we go to be with Him, may we live as people of The Day and lift each other up and encourage each other in their faith. May we rest in the truth that in the end all will be well for God’s people, for Christ the King is Lord and He is returning. Amen.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/1-thessalonians/>

Book of 1 Thessalonians Summary: The Bible Project

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)