

CELL NOTES
For Mac's talk on 31 March 2008
OUR BLESSED HOPE (Titus 2:13)

1.00

A WORLD OF FADING DREAMS

- 1.01 While it is true that our Biblical Hope is very different to the world's understanding of hope, nevertheless it is helpful for us as heralds of hope to seek to understand why there is such a loss of hope in society generally as part of our mission. I suggest this loss is revealed in a number of different ways e.g. in the number of suicides especially among young people and also in the obsession with different forms of escapism which may indicate a desire to avoid facing serious issues about the future. In addition there is much cynicism about politics and even about some expressions of community service.
- 1.02 In this context, I suggest it may be useful to consider the effect on the nation of the major events of the 20th century e.g. World Wars 1 & 2, The Great Depression of the interwar years, The Cold War, the failure of the League of Nations (and to some extent also The United Nations) .
My purpose in this sort of approach is to identify with the evident need around us before we rush in with simplistic solutions to that need.

2.00

THE RETURN OF JESUS (Matt 24,25; 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; 2 Peter 3:1-13)

2.01 The Certainty of Jesus Return

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus will return to earth. Just as God is referred to in Jeremiah as the "hope of Israel" so Jesus is the Hope of the New Israel. Jesus is the focus of the final events which will usher in the New Creation i.e. the Biblical hope that we eagerly await. The "Second Coming" is not a Biblical term, the word "second" only occurring in Heb 9:28. For some it suggests distance or remoteness which is alien to the reality. Other words used e.g. appearing (we get our words apocalypse and epiphany from the Greek for appear) manifestation etc. are more accurate for they suggest immediacy and nearness. Even the Greek word parousia often translated as 'coming' actually means 'presence'. Jesus is ever near and His presence will one day be made manifest, unveiled to our wondering awe and worship.

2.02 The Centrality of Jesus Return

All the major historical creeds expressing the fundamental beliefs of the Church include the return of Jesus to earth.

There are reasons why this great, central truth has been obscured or neglected

- e.g. a) the tendency of some to major on fantastic or exaggerated expositions of some of the terms used in connection with the 'end times' viz the Anti-Christ, the Man of Lawlessness, The Abomination that brings desolation, the Rapture, The Tribulation, The Millennium etc. all legitimate Biblical terms but often

used in a way that deflects from the focus on Jesus and His role.

b) Much dissension and division has been caused by differences of opinion about the interpretation of certain events, particularly the Rapture. The writing of Hal Lindsay and more latterly the novels of Tim la Haye in the “Left Behind” series and Jerry B. Jenkins have been very popular in the USA and views expressed have been challenged by such writers as George Eldon Ladd (“The Blessed Hope”) Stephen Travis (“Christ Will Come Again” - a reprint of his excellent “I Believe in the Second Coming”) and lately by Tom Wright in the outstanding book “Surprised by Hope”.

2.03 The Resurrection of the Body (Phil 3:20; 1 Cor15; Rom 8:23,24)

It is difficult to have hope in the future that God has prepared if we are unsure about our own destiny in that future.

Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples and others in His resurrection-body form, physical yet ‘glorious’ in ways that we do not yet fully understand but when He appears again, at His return “we will be like Him” i.e. having bodies that will equip us to live on the earth which will itself go through a transformation into the “new heaven and new earth”.

So Jesus is the “first born from the dead” (Col 1:18) i.e. not the first to be raised from the dead but the first to have resurrection-body form.

His resurrection is the guarantee of ours.

We therefore look forward with joyful hope to receiving new bodies, fit for a new age in the new creation!

2.04 Judgment Day (Matt 25:31-46; John 5: 22-29; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Cor 5:5)

Jesus return is often referred to in Scripture as the ‘day of the Lord’ and a day of judgment!

There is to be a judgment of believers (2 Cor 5:10) and it would appear this refers particularly to our faithfulness in witness and in good works.

a) Witness : Jesus warned about the danger of not acknowledging Him before others (Matt 10: 32,33).

Paul used quite a strong exhortation in 2 Tim 4:1 to ‘preach the word’ etc based on the coming judgment associated with ‘his appearing’.

b) Works : We are to stir up one another to love and good works “all the more as you see the day approaching” (Heb 10:24,25). 1 Cor 3: 12-14 indicates the testing of our works i.e. ‘the Day will disclose it’.

These ‘judgments’ do not affect our salvation as Jesus makes clear in John 5: 22-24 and Paul in 1 Thess 5: 9,10),

There is to be judgment of the nations, see Matt 25: 31-46.

In the O.T. the prophets looked forward with joyful anticipation to the time when God ‘comes to judge the earth’. Remembering Dave’s talk on the Hope of Justice - justice demands judgment. God intends to judge evil and those who practice it when He establishes the New Creation “in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

2.05 New Heavens and New Earth (2 Peter 3:10; Isa 65 :17; Rev 21 21:1-4 Rom 8: 18-25)

The Biblical hope embraces more than our personal destiny. When Jesus appears again

He will complete the defeat of the powers of evil and abolish death. He will usher in the New Creation, that 'world' in which God will fulfill His heart's desire i.e. to create an environment in which His people can enjoy His presence and He can be their God. We must beware of reducing our hope to "going to heaven when I die" - it is much greater, more glorious, more magnificent than we can imagine. We can however capture glimpses of it in the Scriptures (see Isa 35 for instance) and by reading and reflecting on God's promises, nurture hope so that we really are "eagerly waiting for Him" (Heb 9 : 28).

Questions for Discussion

1. In view of the significance of the "Second Coming" in the life of the Church, in what ways can we recover and maintain its Biblical emphasis and importance.
2. How does the fact that "heaven is coming to earth" affect our outlook, life style and world of view.
3. It is sometimes said that the Second Coming gives urgency to our mission. Discuss this in the light of the fact that the Second Coming is currently considered to be a widely neglected truth.
4. In view of God's plan to create "new heavens and a new earth" what effect does this have on our view of environmental issues etc.