**1 Thessalonians 2:19**

slide 1

**The Imminent Return of Christ**

***19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?***

* In my last message I explained that there are two major points of doctrine contained in this verse. The first . . . which we examined last week . . . is **the crown rewards of Christ** that will be distributed when we go to be with the Lord.
* The second major point of doctrine . . . and one that should be a favorite of us all . . . is Paul’s mention of **the coming of the Lord Jesus.**
* Since the moment of the Lord’s ascension to heaven after His resurrection, **every Christian has lived with the hope and expectation that he or she would see the Lord’s return**.
	+ We read of the Lord’s ascension to heaven and the promise of His return in Acts 1:6-11…

***Acts 1:6-11— 6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." 9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."***

* + One of the interesting phrases here in Acts 1:11 is the promise of the angels that **the Lord Jesus *will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.***
	+ And how did He go? He went up in ***a cloud*** . . . v. 9. And so we expect that He will **return in just the same way.**

**The “*parousia*”**

* Here in 1 Thessalonians 2:19 Paul refers to **believers being *in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming.***
	+ The Greek word for ***coming*** is the word *parousia*. It denotes both an "arrival" and a consequent "continuous presence with."
	+ In the New Testament, the word *parousia* is used to describe **the return of the Lord at the rapture of the church.**
	+ By His “arrival,” the Lord comes and receives the church saints . . . from every age . . . to Himself and transports them to heaven to be with Him, thereby causing us to be **in the continuous presence of the Lord from that moment on.**
	+ When used in passages referring to the Lord, ***parousia* is synonymous with the rapture of the church.**
* The word *parousia* is also found in several other passages in which the Lord is not the subject. For example, in reference to the coming onto the scene of the **anti-Christ**, we see in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 . . .

***2 Thessalonians 2:9— the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders,***

* In his letter to the Philippian church . . . a church body Paul loved as much as the Thessalonians . . . Paul writes from prison of his desire to return to see the Philippians . . .

***Philippians 1:26— so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.***

* In fact 17 of the 22 occurrences of the word *parousia* in the New Testament are used in reference to ***the coming of the Lord***.
	+ When used in reference to the return of Christ at the rapture of the church, *parousia* signifies, not merely His momentary "appearing" to His saints, but **His “continuous presence with” them from that moment until His revelation and manifestation to the world.**

**The time of the rapture**

* Upon learning what the rapture is, **the immediate question** on the mind of every Christian is . . . **When will that be? When will the Lord return?**
	+ The answer to this question has been the subject of much debate and animated disagreement for the past 2000 years. And the reason for the debate and disagreement is because there is disagreement concerning the meaning of key passages in Scripture that refer . . . or don’t refer . . . to when this event will occur.
* I told you last week that this subject . . . the ***coming of the Lord*** . . . is a significant subject in both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians. And, as it turns out, Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians are the source of some of the most significant passages concerning the timing of the rapture.
	+ The most significant passage concerning the rapture of the church is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16 . . .

***1 Thessalonians 4:15-16— 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.***

* The reason this passage is so important is because it teaches us several very important points regarding the rapture event.
	+ **First**, Paul specifically tells us that what He is describing is ***the coming of the Lord***.
	+ **Secondly**, he then describes, in v. 16, what events will occur at the time of the rapture.
		- ***The Lord Himself will descend from heaven***
		- There will be ***a shout with the voice of the archangel***
		- There will be a blast of ***the trumpet of God***
* With His arrival from heaven, the Lord will be fulfilling the promise of the angels in Acts 1:11 that ***this Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.***

**The Jewish Wedding custom**

* In the time of Christ, the Jews practiced what seems to us as a formal and somewhat complicated wedding custom.
* First of all, marital unions were a family matter, in which a match was made between two families, usually with the help of a matchmaker.
	+ Romantic love was not even a consideration. In fact, many couples did not even know one another at the time they were betrothed. The fathers arranged the marriages of their sons and daughters.
* One a match had been made by the father, the first step in the process was the **betrothal**.
	+ This step involved the bridegroom traveling from his father’s house to the home of the prospective bride, paying the purchase price, and thus establishing the marriage covenant.
	+ **Sound familiar?** Jesus came from His Father’s house in heaven, paid the purchase price for His bride with life, thus establishing the marriage covenant.
* The young man and young woman were then formally betrothed . . . declared husband and wife, but with a wedding ceremony still yet to come.
	+ This is the case we find with Joseph’s marriage to Mary in Matthew 1:18-19 . . .

***Matthew 1:18-19— 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.***

* + - In the case of Joseph and Mary, they had been betrothed and were regarded as husband and wife, but they had not yet completed their wedding ceremony and were not living together as a married couple.
* As part of the betrothal ceremony, the bridegroom and bride drink from a ceremonial cup that seals the covenant . . . as we see symbolized in Luke 22:20 . . .

***Luke 22:20— Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.***

* Having sealed the marriage covenant with the drinking from the cup, the bride then goes through a ritual cleansing. We see a parallel in Scripture in which we, the bride of Christ, are cleansed, as described in Acts 2:38 and Ephesians 5:25-27 . . .

***Acts 2:38— hen Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***

***Ephesians 5:25-27— 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.***

* Then, having been legally betrothed to his bride, the bridegroom then gives her a gift as a pledge of his fealty to her.
	+ For the church, the bride of Christ, we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, as we just read in Acts 2:38. The Holy Spirit is given as a pledge of our future inheritance in Christ. We find this explicitly stated in Ephesians 1:13-14 . . .

***Ephesians 1:13-14— 13 . . . you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.***

* + - The Holy Spirit was given to us by our Bridegroom as a pledge of our future inheritance and to protect us until our Bridegroom comes.
* After the betrothal ceremony the husband then leaves his betrothed and returns home to begin preparing a home for his wife.
	+ Generally the home would be an addition to the husband’s family home or an adjoining house.
	+ It would often take many months of work to prepare a home for his wife. And **it was the bridegroom’s father who would decide when the home his son had prepared was satisfactory** for his new wife.
	+ We see this societal practice reflected in the Lord’s words to his disciples in John 14, when he tells them He is leaving . . .

***John 14:1-3— 1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.***

* + - In this passage we can see the imagery of the Lord going to prepare a place to bring His bride by building a place for us **in His Father’s house.**
* During the time the bridegroom and bride are apart, the bride is legally betrothed to the bridegroom and must keep herself chaste and consecrated to the bridegroom.
* Finally, the day comes when the bridegroom’s father gives his approval to the house his son has built and gives his consent for the wedding to proceed.
	+ Wedding preparations are finalized and the wedding guests are invited. **But the bride is not informed of the time or the date.**
	+ According to Jewish custom, while the bride was making her preparations to become a wife and to set up a house, she was also to prepare herself for her bridegroom to come for her at any time.
	+ For the bride, the anticipation of coming of the bridegroom was exciting, because she did not know the exact time of his coming for her. As time went on, she knew that the time was drawing near, but she did not know the exact moment he would return.
* Then, one day . . . usually in the evening . . . the bridegroom comes for his bride.
	+ The bridegroom and his attendants come to the bride’s family home and **with the shout of the bridegroom’s entourage, the bridegroom’s arrival is announced.**
	+ Again, we see the imagery in the Lord’s arrival in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 . . .

***1 Thessalonians 4:16— For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.***

* + - Just as the Jewish bridegroom announces his arrival to take his bride to the wedding ceremony, so the Lord’s arrival will be announced by ***a shout with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God***.
* Because the bridegroom can come at any time, the bride and her bridal party must always be ready for the arrival of the bridegroom. This constant readiness is what is taught in Jesus’ parable of **the ten virgins** in Matthew 25:1-6 . . .
	+ ***Matthew 25:1-6— 1*** ***"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'***
	+ While the subject of the parable is the need to be spiritually ready to meet the Lord, as we read in v. 6, the Lord’s arrival is equated to the arrival of a bridegroom to get his bride.
* Having come to get his bride and the bridal party, the wedding party returns to the bridegroom’s father’s house, where the wedding ceremony then occurs.
* Following the wedding ceremony the newly married husband and wife then go into a period of **7 days of seclusion**.
	+ Following the 7 days, the couple emerges from their seclusion and they join the invited guest for the **marriage supper**.
* One of the interesting things about the significance of the 7 days of seclusion, prior to the marriage supper, is the fact that **if you hold to a pre-tribulational view of the rapture**, the 7 days of seclusion corresponds to the **7 years of tribulation**, which precede the triumphal return of Christ to the earth.
	+ According to the pre-tribulational view, at the end of the 7 years of tribulation . . . the symbolic 7 day period . . . we read in Revelation 19:7-9 . . .

***Revelation 19:7-9— 7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."***

**The doctrine of Imminence**

* As I mentioned earlier, there is much disagreement among Christians regarding the timing of the Lord’s return for His bride. It is not my desire or intent to explain all the views.
	+ While the doctrine of our church is that of a **pre-tribulational rapture**, I also know that there are many in our congregation who hold to other views and make good arguments for why they hold to their views.
* In addition to the significant amount of symbolism I just laid out concerning the Jewish wedding ceremony, there is one additional point that I want to make in support of the **pre-tribulational view of the rapture**.
	+ One of the most significant facts regarding the ***coming of the Lord*** is the fact that the Lord stressed, on many occasions, that **He can return at any time**. And, as such, He instructs us to **constantly be ready for His return**.
	+ In addition to the parable of **the ten virgins**, in Matthew 25, we also find this instruction to be in constant readiness for His return in Luke 12:35-40 . . .

***Luke 12:35-40— 35 "Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. 36 Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. 38 Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. 39 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 40 You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."***

* The Lord’s instruction and warning that He can return at any moment is known as **the Doctrine of Imminence**.
	+ The **doctrine of imminence** states simply that **there is nothing that must occur on the prophetic timeline that precedes the return of Christ for His bride**.
	+ The rapture of the church is an imminent event. That is why every generation of Christians has lived with the hope and expectation that the Lord could return at any time. Nothing has to precede His ***coming***.
* On the other hand, other views of the rapture . . . the mid-tribulational, pre-wrath and post-tribulational views . . . all **must** be preceded by various prophetic events, as laid out in Daniel and Revelation.
	+ This means that other views do not . . . can not . . . see the rapture of the church as an imminent event. The rapture must be preceded by one or more events before it can occur.
	+ For example, the post-tribulational rapture view sees the rapture occurring at the end of the 7 year tribulation. The events of the Tribulation are explained in Revelation chapters 6-19. And if these events must come first, we have a great many prophetic events that must precede the rapture.
	+ Only the pre-tribulational rapture view sees the rapture as an imminent event.

**What about the events foretold in Matthew 24?**

* Regarding the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ, some Christians point to the events prophesied in Matthew 24 as evidence that some events must come before the Lord’s return. We read in Matthew 24:3-14 . . .

***Matthew 24:3-14— 3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6 You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. 9 Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. 14 This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.***

* As we read the Olivet Discourse, the most important question we must first answer is . . . **who is Jesus speaking about?**
	+ In v. 9 when Jesus says that ***they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name***, **is He speaking about the church?**
		- **NO!!** He talking to His Jewish disciples. Remember, the church did not exist and was unknown to the disciples until after Pentecost.
		- The things Jesus is speaking of in Matthew 24 . . . the destruction of the temple, the persecution by the world and the events described . . . are events that would and will occur to the nation of Israel.
* As you read through the Olivet Discourse, it is vitally important that you understand who Jesus is speaking to and about.
	+ When the disciples ask Him, in v. 3, ***what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*** the ***coming*** and ***end of the age*** are reference to His second coming at the end of the Tribulation.
	+ Jesus would not be referring to His return at the rapture because His ascension does not occur until Acts 1:9-11. Any reference to His return at the rapture would make no sense since He had not yet departed?
* Here in the Olivet Discourse Jesus is answering the question, **“what is going to happen to Israel, not the church.**
* I have taken the time this morning to explain what I believe are the events concerning ***the coming of the Lord Jesus***, referred to by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:19.
	+ Since Paul does not go on to explain his reference to ***the coming of the Lord Jesus***, we can infer that the Thessalonians had already been taught about the Lord’s ***coming***. They knew what Paul was referring to.
	+ Only their confusion regarding those who had died prior to the Lord’s ***coming*** for the church had caused them confusion and is the reason for Paul’s explanation later in chapter 4.
* The fact that the first generation of the church was already looking for the ***coming of the Lord*** is further attested to by the teaching of Peter in 2 Peter 1:16 . . .

***2 Peter 1:16— For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.***

* + Peter’s statement here indicates that teaching on ***the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*** was an integral part of the instruction to the early church. Every believer lived with the hope and expectation of the Lord’s imminent return.
* So, having already received from Paul a knowledge of the Lord’s ***coming*** at the rapture, and knowing that the saints would be receiving various reward ***crowns*** when we come before the Lord at **the judgment seat of Christ** . . . here in v. 19 Paul’s purpose for mentioning both the **crown rewards and coming of the Lord is to exhort and encourage the Thessalonian believers with those doctrines they were already familiar with**.
	+ Paul was encouraging them with what they already knew to be true. But, because we have not had the benefit of Paul’s personal mentoring, this passage serves as instructional to us.
	+ **This passage is significant in that it instructs us, who did not have the benefit of Paul’s personal instruction, regarding an aspect of the Lord’s crown rewards and His coming for the church.**
* After studying this verse over the past 2 weeks, I hope that I have accomplished what I believe Paul to be doing . . . to exhort, encourage and excite you about events that are yet to occur regarding the time when we hear ***the shout with the voice of the archangel*** and we go to meet the Lord and go to be with Him forever.
	+ I can think of nothing better or more wonderful to think upon. I long for the day when the Lord returns. This anxious expectation of the Lord’s ***coming*** is reflected in the close of this letter to the Thessalonians . . .

***1 Thessalonians 5:23— Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

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**Closing prayer**

**Preparation for the Lord’s Table**

* As we now come to the Lord’s Table, I was very pleased that I had the opportunity to explain the symbolic significance of the Lord’s Table in reference to the Jewish Wedding tradition.
* I explained that as part of the betrothal process the betrothed bride and bridegroom drank from a cup to seal the covenant of marriage . . . as we read in Luke 22:20 . . .

***Luke 22:20— Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.***

* + As we come to the Lord’s Table this morning, the taking of the communion cup takes on added significance.
	+ Not only are we taking the cup in remembrance of the Lord’s shed blood to purchase us as His bride, but the cup continues to remind us that we have entered into a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. He is our Bridegroom and we are His bride.
	+ We will continue to celebrate His sacrificial death and give thanks and praise for the Father choosing us to be His Son’s bride every time we partake of the bread and cup, until the day He comes with a shout of the archangel and takes us to be with Him forever!