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PREACHING WITH URGENCY:  
HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT'S TEACHING ON THE  
SECOND COMING OF CHRIST NECESSITATES  
EARNEST PROCLAMATION

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the Faculty of  
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by  
Robert Doughton Lyerly III  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

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To Webber, my bride. You are a gift from the Lord.

And to our daughters, Anne Doughton and Grace.

May you always know my love for you.

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## PREFACE

I will never forget the season of life when I first felt the tug on my heart to preach the Word. Since the fall of 2009, the relentless rhythm in my mind has been to “proclaim.” What follows is an overflow of that calling and passion. This thesis arose from a deep burden to rightly herald the majesty of King Jesus and a desire to lead others to do the same.

I am humbled and thankful to the Lord for such a calling. I see the opportunity to preach and write on preaching as a blessed privilege. I am grateful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for rigorous training and being entrusted to write on preaching with urgency. The leadership of my supervisor, Dr. Michael Pohlman, will be felt throughout this work, and I am indebted to his expertise and giftedness. The editing was completed by Mrs. Betsy Fredrick, and her insights are especially appreciated. Finally, my writing efforts would be impossible without my wife, Webber. My gratitude for her and the unwavering support she provides cannot be put into words.

It is my prayer that the work of this thesis will bring honor to the triune God and will thrust a generation of expositors to proclaim the Word with urgency. I hope to be an instrument of God’s grace in enhancing preaching around the globe. May the Master be pleased to use this resource for the praise of his name, the edification of the church, and the reaching of the nations. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

R. D. Lyerly III

Birmingham, Alabama

December 2020

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Today, there is a desperate need for urgent preaching. In the visible church, many flocks are entertained, amused, and charmed with messages focused on the temporal.<sup>1</sup> While plenty of individuals speak, few preachers stand behind the sacred desk and preach in the light of eternity. One specific failure of the modern pulpit is that not enough sermons emphasize the return of King Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

In 2018, Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research conducted a survey to assess the theological climate of Christendom. In the poll, only 63 percent of professing evangelicals in the United States stated that they “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” with the idea that “There will be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all the people who have lived.” In the same analysis, just 54 percent of American evangelicals “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat Agree” with the statement that “Hell is a real place where certain people will be punished forever.”<sup>3</sup> These numbers indicate desperate problems in the church of Jesus Christ. Portions of God’s people are ignorant of the second coming of

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur explains, “The experts are now telling... [pastors to] provide non-Christians with an agreeable, inoffensive environment. Give them freedom, tolerance, and anonymity. Always be positive and benevolent. If you must have a sermon, keep it brief and amusing. Don’t be preachy or authoritative. Above all, keep everyone entertained.” John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*. 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 40th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 17-32. Martyn Lloyd-Jones condemned the poor state of preaching in his day, fifty years ago. He called the entertainer in the pulpit a “pulpititeer” and believed that a revival of biblical preaching was necessary. One can only imagine what he would say today.

<sup>3</sup> Ligonier Ministries, “The State of American Theology Study 2018,” accessed December 4, 2019, <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Ligonier-State-of-Theology-2018.pdf>, 22-23. Further commentary on the results can be found at [www.thestateoftheology.com](http://www.thestateoftheology.com). Sadly, the statistics of the examination given to those in the United Kingdom reveal an even lower percentage of affirmative responses to the reality of hell and the second coming of Christ.

Jesus Christ, do not take the reality of his arrival seriously, and are unphased by the eternal consequences of the day of judgment that awaits humanity.

The condemnation from the Lifeway and Ligonier study falls on preachers. If congregants are misinformed or disengaged on these essential matters, the finger must be pointed at those who teach. It is common for Bible teachers to mention that Jesus could return at any moment, but this cognitive knowledge does not translate into zealous proclamation. So, it must be asked, is there a lack of understanding among pastors as to what will take place on that day, or are men failing to meditate on the gravity of Christ's return? Might there be other reasons why preachers refrain from disclosing the fullness of the parousia with their listeners?<sup>4</sup>

Preachers who preach with laxity tend to be focused on the temporal and fail to arouse listeners' focus on eternity. Without regular warnings about the imminence of the Lord's return (and the reckoning all people will give on that day), Christians cannot fully grasp the importance of living holy lifestyles. Lacking hope in the age to come, comfort through trials is diminished. There is little fuel for evangelism, so people die and go to hell while congregations occupy their days with the worries of the world. As "The State of Theology" study illustrates, far too many pulpits are pleasant, shallow, and timid.<sup>5</sup>

However, when God's messengers grasp the imminence of the second coming of Christ and understand that with his advent Jesus brings judgment, reward, and the eternal state, preaching is transformed. Men of God are burdened to warn the unconverted, urge people to live with a gaze on the everlasting, and encourage Christ-followers to chase holiness. Therefore, work must be done to expose the New Testament's teaching on Jesus's second coming and its influence on the ministry of the Word. Ministers need

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<sup>4</sup> James White addresses the tendency in some sermons to soften the words of God or ignore certain subjects in (what appears to be) an attempt to avoid negative comments from listeners. James R. White, *Pulpit Crimes: The Criminal Mishandling of God's Word* (Homewood, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2006), 79-86.

<sup>5</sup> Ligonier Ministries, "The State of American Theology Study 2018."

to be shown what the New Testament explains regarding the parousia and how it impacts every preaching event.

This thesis argues that an apprehension of the second coming of Christ creates an earnestness in preaching. Through exegesis of Matthew 24:36-51 and 1 Peter 4:7-5:4, the exhortation to be expectant for the Lord's arrival is displayed. By reviewing John 5:25-29 and Matthew 25:31-46, it is shown that when Jesus returns, he brings both damnation and eternal reward. This judgment is linked to 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5 to evidence that with Jesus's return, all of mankind will stand and give an account of their lives. Finally, the definition of preaching and its connection to eternity is established with a study of 2 Timothy 4:1-8.

With the sobriety of the second advent presented and the fullness of that day detailed, the need to preach with urgency is obvious. Using exegesis, homiletical discussion, and practical application, preachers are summoned to embrace their calling and lead the charge in earnest proclamation.

### **Familiarity with the Literature**

Many faithful preachers have sought to equip pastors in the pursuit of accurately handling the Word. Intentions and focal points for each work vary, but the Lord has used these books to strengthen those who herald his truth, bless the beloved, and convert the unregenerate. A few works should be examined.<sup>6</sup>

Sixteenth century preacher William Perkins shared his convictions on preaching that are still read today. *The Art of Prophesying and the Calling of the Ministry* is a classic two-part work on biblical proclamation and the minister's need to be called of God. Perkins' words are clear and direct, and he beckons the reader to soberly assess the task of the modern-day prophet. For Perkins, preaching begins with God, is centered on God, and he will bless those he sends. This is seen when a man preaches in the power of the

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<sup>6</sup> Space limits a full synopsis of every book on preaching. This section highlights representative volumes of conservative preaching from the Reformation era until today.

Almighty, and all those in attendance “recognise that it is not so much the preacher who is speaking, but the Spirit of God in him and by him.”<sup>7</sup>

Famous Southern Baptist leader John Broadus articulated his thoughts on preaching in *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. His book covers a wide scope of priorities for heralding the message of God, but is largely known for its emphasis on style.<sup>8</sup> Not only does Broadus recommend a preacher consider the way he is received by his audience, but he is meticulous in giving focal points to the preacher. He helps the reader understand the importance of delivery while also providing specific matters to contemplate in preparing and delivering God’s truth.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s *Lectures to my Students* is a staple in any preaching library. The great English preacher ministered in London and developed a college to train pastors. *Lectures to my Students* is a compilation of lessons Spurgeon gave on the role of a shepherd and the preaching event. Covering a mass of material, the students learned what it meant to be called of God, how one should prepare, pray, and the intricacies of sharing with a large crowd (just to highlight a few topics). Spurgeon’s legendary style and his prominence as the “Prince of Preachers” made his instruction precious in his context, and it continues to be a gem in the modern era.

Welsh expositor D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones articulated his approach to preaching in a series of talks given at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1969 that he then transferred to a book, *Preaching and Preachers*.<sup>9</sup> Standing as one of the monumental works in all of homiletics, Lloyd-Jones covers a great deal of material. He wept over the pitiful state of preaching in his time and taught on the “primacy of preaching.”<sup>10</sup> Lloyd-

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<sup>7</sup> William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying and the Calling of the Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 68.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1979), 199-235.

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 17-32.

Jones is one of the few men throughout history who regularly iterated the need for insistence in the pulpit. For Lloyd-Jones, to preach was to be “serious and lively” and he believed that one must proclaim with “urgency” and “zeal.”<sup>11</sup> In *Preaching and Preachers*, he explains, “Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire. A true understanding and experience of the Truth must lead to this. I say again that a man who can speak about these things dispassionately has no right whatsoever to be in a pulpit; and should never be allowed to enter one.”<sup>12</sup>

John Stott’s *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* has been helping God’s servants for three decades. Written with a pastor’s heart, Stott encourages readers to embrace their duty and realize the greatness of the opportunity to feed those for whom Christ died. Knowing the contemporary context, he helps the preacher connect with modern listeners while also revealing the historical testimony of God’s work through anointed preachers.<sup>13</sup> Stott realizes the need for fervor in the preaching moment, and uses the apostle Paul’s emotions and his “[care] for the glory of Christ”<sup>14</sup> as an example of passion in the pulpit.

*Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson is a work that not only teaches sermon delivery and intricacies of the preaching event but focuses specifically on expository preaching. Believing there is a poor understanding of preaching, Robinson includes definitions of biblical exposition, emphasizes its need in the church, and details how one can follow the divine prescription to preach as an expositor.<sup>15</sup> By including visual aids,

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<sup>11</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 99-108.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 110.

<sup>13</sup> John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 1-28.

<sup>14</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 214.

<sup>15</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 1-14. Robinson sets the stage with an opening chapter titled, “The Case for Expository Preaching.”

graphs, and illustrations, Robinson equips the reader to become sharper in the biblical text. Serving as a preacher and a professor, Robinson grants unique insights that can help the novice or the experienced minister.

Pastor, theologian, and preacher Bryan Chapell relays the necessity to preach as an expositor in *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. A modern classic, this volume has been used around the globe to teach and enhance preaching. Chapell provides countless benefits in his work, but one distinct aspect of *Christ-Centered Preaching* is the emphasis on the Lord Jesus, and the relentless approach the preacher must have to develop “redemptive” sermons.<sup>16</sup> For Chapell, the preacher must “capture the redemptive flow” of each passage of Scripture and should display the gospel to the congregation.<sup>17</sup>

*Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, written by Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, is a modern resource that has been used as a textbook in seminaries. The authors provide counsel to the student on a broad range of topics and faithfully help the pastor grow in his understanding of preaching. Both Vines and Shaddix have spent decades heralding God’s message and share viewpoints that come with years of service. They display the importance of “understanding the anointing” of God upon a man<sup>18</sup> and they explain that to preach is to proclaim. Proclaiming comes from the recesses of emotions of the preacher, ranging from personal heartache to deep passion over the

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<sup>16</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 269-328. Chapell devotes one-third of the book to propel the preacher to think, prepare, and deliver messages with Christ’s redemptive work in view.

<sup>17</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 297.

<sup>18</sup> Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 64.

glories of the Word.<sup>19</sup> Also, with a heart for evangelism, Vines and Shaddix defend the need to publicly appeal to the lost to come to saving faith.<sup>20</sup>

Hershael York and Bert Decker continue the preaching lessons in their book *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition*. Combining York's expertise in exegesis, homiletics, and pastoral ministry with Decker's experience in professional communication firms, this work is a well-rounded tool in the hands of a preacher. While providing multiple avenues of study, *Preaching with Bold Assurance* sets itself apart in its dedication to effective delivery.<sup>21</sup> Understanding the vital nature of forcefulness in preaching, York and Becker write, "Energy, passion, conviction—these are the *essential* ingredients of Christian communication. Enthusiasm and passion are not optional equipment; they are critically important because the treasure of truth we handle is worth it. No other message in the world deserves such excitement and intensity."<sup>22</sup>

Pastor Jason Meyer presents his magnum opus, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology*, to combat the lack of fully-orbed manuals on preaching.<sup>23</sup> Intending to cover the "what, how, and why of expository preaching,"<sup>24</sup> Meyer equips the reader to see preaching through the lens of the entire biblical corpus. Understanding the preacher's role as a herald, one who is a steward of God's grace, Meyer eloquently and powerfully displays

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<sup>19</sup> Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 346-53.

<sup>20</sup> In the section titled "Inspiring Invitation," Vines and Shaddix recommend a public invitation of the gospel and offer multiple methods to use, depending on the preacher's context. Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 210-18.

<sup>21</sup> Hershael W. York and Bert Decker devote a major section of the work to delivery and the impact one can have with the audience. Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H, 2003), 195-260.

<sup>22</sup> York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 216.

<sup>23</sup> Jason Meyer writes that most preaching books are "incomplete." Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 316.

<sup>24</sup> These are the major headings of the third section of the book, "Expository Preaching Today." Meyer, *Preaching*, 237-79.

the biblical precedent of proclaiming the Word of God. He exposes the Lord's power through preaching and articulates how he has worked through those speaking his truth from creation to the present day. After using the biblical text to articulate his views, Meyer provides application to the reader. He challenges the preacher to devote himself to seeking the Lord in all things, reiterating that "preaching is a high calling. It is not just difficult; it is impossible with man."<sup>25</sup>

*Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, edited by Don Kistler, is a book that combines preaching insights from eleven preacher-theologians. With the simple conviction that to pastor is to preach, *Feed My Sheep* includes helpful reminders for all who minister to the bride of Christ. R. Albert Mohler spurs the shepherd to understand his calling when he points to the coming account all overseers will give in their stewardship of the Word.<sup>26</sup> Eric Alexander adds to Mohler's words by reviewing 2 Corinthians 5, and correlates Paul's awareness of the day of judgment as a motivation for evangelistic preaching.<sup>27</sup>

T. David Gordon bluntly addresses failures in the modern pulpit in *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* when he states, "Less than 30 percent of those who are ordained to the Christian ministry can preach an even mediocre sermon."<sup>28</sup> Following the rebuke, he includes the hypothesis that the contemporary world has minimized reading and writing, and therefore those entering the pastorate are incapable of communicating effectively. According to Gordon, "Johnny can't read" and "Johnny can't write" and is therefore unable to express thoughts cogently to an audience. Whether this failure is an inability to understand categories or manifests itself in a misinterpretation

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<sup>25</sup> Meyer, *Preaching*, 310.

<sup>26</sup> R. Albert Mohler, "The Primacy of Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2008), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Eric J. Alexander, "Evangelistic Preaching," in Kistler, *Feed My Sheep*, 124-25.

<sup>28</sup> T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 11.

of a passage, there are devastating consequences for the church. However, while he offers stinging words of criticism directed toward the preacher, Gordon’s passion comes from an unwavering belief in the power of the Word rightly proclaimed. His verdict is sobering: “Show me a church where the preaching is good, and yet the church is still moribund. I’ve never seen such a church. The moribund churches I’ve seen have been malpreached to death.”<sup>29</sup>

Jonathan Griffiths develops premises for preaching the Bible in *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study*. Packing an expansive amount of material in a small volume, Griffiths takes seven passages of the New Testament and builds a case for expository preaching. He defines the different uses of “preaching” in the New Testament, detailing each phrase and its impact on rightly understanding what it means to preach.<sup>30</sup> Being unwaveringly committed to the “why” of preaching as opposed to the “how,”<sup>31</sup> Griffiths’ work is a treatise on the New Testament’s teaching on heralding the Word to the beloved.

Keeping with a lifetime of ministry centered on the glory of God and the Christian’s opportunity to joyfully serve King Jesus, John Piper uses *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* as an instructional manual on the essence of preaching. For Piper, preaching is not something sprinkled into a Lord’s Day service. Rather, it is the centerpiece of the corporate gathering of Christ’s bride. He emphatically states, “Preaching not only *assists* worship, but also *is* worship.”<sup>32</sup> According to Piper, preaching is a supernatural moment wherein the people are drawn to magnify the Lord

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<sup>29</sup> Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Preach*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Griffiths presents the Greek words for “preach”—*euangelizomai*, *katangelo*, and *kerysso*—and nuances the differences of each usage. Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 17-40.

<sup>31</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, 1-2.

<sup>32</sup> John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 16.

through the preacher's service. The book is centered on the majesty of the Lord and the need of the preacher to understand that all of life, ministry, and proclamation is to make much of Christ. The goal of preaching is to expound the inerrant Word, worship and relish the Almighty, and help others to do the same.<sup>33</sup>

### Void in the Literature

While a wealth of resources is available, there is need for writing devoted to urgency in preaching. The specific void that exists in homiletical literature is the focus on urgency in the pulpit, especially the motivation to preach with unction due to the imminent return of Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> Study must be completed that shows how the imminence of Christ's second advent directly influences public proclamation and how it compels preachers to labor in the light of eternity. Work must be presented that reveals King Jesus could return at any moment, and when he descends from heaven, the lost are damned, Christ-followers will give a report of their days, and the eternal state will be realized. The New Testament's teaching on these areas, and the grave reality that eternity could be at the door in an instant, propel preachers to proclaim the Word with fervor.<sup>35</sup>

Preachers have no lack of options when learning about body language, exegesis, and sermon structure. The mechanics of formulating thoughts, ways to transition through sermon points, and perspectives on how to dress are thoroughly discussed.<sup>36</sup> Is a preacher

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<sup>33</sup> Piper, *Expository Exultation*.

<sup>34</sup> Meyer has a section in his book titled "The *Why* of Expository Preaching." Although covering multiple necessities and exposing great motivations to preach the Word in these pages, Meyer does not address urgency or the second coming of Christ. Meyer, *Preaching*, 270-79.

<sup>35</sup> Griffiths examines seven New Testament passages to defend the need for expository preaching. However, none of the passages he exposit are teaching about or linked to Christ's return. He examines 2 Tim 3-4 but focuses on the connection between Old Testament prophets and New Testament preaching, while also analyzing the Greek term, *kerysso*. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, 53-60.

<sup>36</sup> Abraham Kuruvilla covers these topics in detail in two separate works, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019); and *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015). While providing valuable insights, he does not address the need for urgency or the weight of Christ's return and its impact on the preaching event.

wrestling through using manuscripts versus extemporaneous preaching? Differing viewpoints are prevalent and readily shared.<sup>37</sup> However, comb through works on preaching, and there is little conversation on the need for zeal behind the lectern.

Some books explain that pastors will give an account of their ministries before the Lord. Other works remind the reader that some under their care are lost and need to hear the gospel, because they will face condemnation otherwise.<sup>38</sup> But where is the correlation between these teachings and preaching with intensity? Why are there so few warnings that the day of judgment, which will entail both the assessment of a Christian's life and the damnation of the lost, could occur this very day?<sup>39</sup>

If the insistent character of preaching is mentioned in books, it is touched on briefly, usually without detailed foundation. Most modern authors do not devote many pages to earnestness in preaching and tend to gloss over the subject with little challenge given to the reader.<sup>40</sup> Stated differently, there is minimal justification given to preaching

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<sup>37</sup> For example, York and Decker argue against preaching with a manuscript in *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, while Gary Millar and Phil Campbell call for the need to preach from a full manuscript in *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Vines and Shaddix expose the need for evangelistic preaching in sermons, never assuming listeners are converted. They write with passion for the salvation of souls, but do not comment on the imminence of Jesus's advent and spend little time pressing the reader for urgent proclamation. Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 210-18.

<sup>39</sup> Mohler soberly reminds the reader of the day of assessment that will come as a motivation for faithfulness, but he does not include that this judgment may only be minutes away. Mohler, "The Primacy of Preaching," 9.

<sup>40</sup> Using the example of Jonathan Edwards, John Piper exhorts preachers to "be intense." He establishes the need for tenacity in the grandeur of God and the weighty matters being discussed from the pulpit. He also shows how the Lord has blessed men throughout history who took their role as modern-day prophets seriously. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 105-7. Piper is part of a small group of writers who present the importance of gravity in preaching, but only devotes a handful of pages to the need for intensity and does not connect earnestness to the parousia.

with seriousness, if it is noted at all.<sup>41</sup> In the pile of writing concentrated on preaching, urgency has been overlooked or simply assumed.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, literature must be produced that centers on preaching with urgency with a focus on eschatological consummation. The exhortation to preach in earnest should be defended by using the second coming of Christ as motivation. Preachers need to feel the weight of the fullness of Jesus's imminent arrival and should be charged to preach accordingly.

### **Thesis Statement**

The preacher's mission is to herald the glories of the living God for Christ's renown, the good of his people, and the reaching of the nations. Such faithful preaching is only possible when the expositor proclaims the Word in earnest. Scripture grounds the pressing nature of preaching in the imminence of the Lord's return. This thesis argues that preachers must preach with urgency and shows that motivation for doing so comes from the New Testament's teaching on the second coming of Christ.

This position is defended in the following way. First, the imminence of the Savior's return is unveiled by showing multiple warnings in the New Testament regarding the imminence of the parousia. Second, this work exposes what is to occur at the second coming, focusing specifically on the judgment for all humanity and the eternal

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<sup>41</sup> Lloyd-Jones provides some of the most beneficial material focused on "zeal," "seriousness," and "urgency." Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 99-112. Not only did he model such a pathos in his preaching, but his writing presents a focus on preaching with urgency. Although he is one of the few authors to expressly note the necessity of urgency in proclamation, he does not pair urgency with the imminent return of the Lord. He explains the serious nature of preaching God's Word and the eternal consequences of souls under the preacher's care. Lloyd-Jones also alludes to the fact that one who is flippant in such things is a charlatan, but he does not address Christ's return or remind the reader that eternity could be realized without notice.

<sup>42</sup> Jerry Vines and Adam Dooley eloquently explain the need to preach the mood of the biblical passage. They issue a necessary warning against "dull and boring" teaching from the pulpit. Jerry Vines and Adam Dooley, *Passion in the Pulpit: How to Exegete the Emotion of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 138. However, their work does not center on preaching with urgency and does not address the coming return of Christ as a motivation for preaching in earnest. While the realities of heaven and hell are mentioned in passing (p. 60), *Passion in the Pulpit* is more of a guide to delivering the tone of a given text as opposed to being a catalyst for proclaiming the Word in light of eternity.

repercussions that follow. Study of the warning and judgment passages yield a heightened sense of the importance of preaching with urgency. Third, the return of Jesus and its correlation to earnest preaching is explained from a different angle. This chapter includes a definition of preaching and reveals how the definition is attached to the second coming. Through this argumentation, the necessity for preachers to rightly know and reflect upon the second advent when feeding God's people and appealing to the lost is clear. Lastly, application is made for the global church.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE IMMINENCE OF CHRIST'S RETURN

The New Testament teaches that the second coming of Jesus Christ is imminent. Multiple passages reflect the imminence of the parousia, and the pressing reality of Christ's return has dire consequences. Because of the Lord's arrival, all of humanity is to be notified.

The New Testament's emphasis on the imminence of Jesus's return is defined by two focal points. First, the New Testament warns of the uncertain timing of the second coming, explaining that no creature will know the day or the hour of Christ's arrival. Therefore, the entire world must be ready for that day.<sup>1</sup> Second, the New Testament teaches that the second coming of Christ is the next great event in redemptive history, so the world should be expectant, longing, and looking for that moment.<sup>2</sup>

When the gravity of the imminence of the second coming is realized, the weight of eternity is magnified, and the fleeting nature of the temporal is put into perspective. The unconverted should be alerted of their need for salvation, Christians should be urged to live for holiness, and those facing the trials of life can be comforted with the good news of their Savior's rescue.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan S. Bandy and Benjamin L. Merkle, *Understanding Prophecy: A Biblical-Theological Approach* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 179-81. Bandy and Merkle find the same theme in the New Testament. When summarizing four thoughts regarding the New Testament's teaching on the second coming, they state that one conclusion is "Christ's return is certain but the time is unknown" (179) and a second is "Christ's return should motivate us to readiness" (180).

<sup>2</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 109-28. In the chapter titled "The Expectation of the Second Coming," Hoekema confirms the position of this thesis. He notes the New Testament's teaching on the imminence and the redemptive focus of the second coming. Regarding the assurance of the second coming and its purpose in redemption, he writes, "For the New Testament writers, the nearness of the parousia is not so much a chronological nearness as a 'salvation-history' nearness" (126).

In this chapter, Matthew 24:36-51 is examined to reveal that the Gospels teach the imminence of the second coming, and it is shown how this is given as a warning. First Peter 4:7-5:4 is also expounded to reflect an epistle that teaches on the imminence of Jesus's return, showing that the coming parousia is used as a comfort for struggling Christ-followers as well as motivation for holiness. With both passages, the imminence of Christ's return is connected to preaching, providing foundation for preaching with urgency.

### **Matthew 24:36-51**

The need to preach with urgency is realized through the New Testament admonitions regarding the second coming of Christ. As the preacher studies the Word of God, the steady exhortation from the New Testament is to be on guard because Jesus Christ may return at any moment. Therefore, ministers must live in the light of eternity while equipping listeners to do the same.

Matthew 24:36-51 is a portion of Scripture where Jesus prepares his followers for the second coming, and the text is full of everlasting consequences and an aroma of urgency. The Savior warns those in attendance to be looking for his return, and he alerts them of the need to be prepared. Using multiple illustrations, Christ exhorts the disciples to be expectant for his descension from heaven.

Today, it is imperative that preachers not only grasp the lesson from Matthew 24:36-51, but men of God must align their ministries accordingly. Preachers should be consumed with eternity and therefore serve in the light of the second coming. Consequently, those who lead God's people must preach in earnest. Preachers are called to warn the world, comfort the believer, and urge the church to holy living, all because of the King's return. Through a study of the context of Matthew 24:36-51 and detailed exegesis, the need to preach with urgency is clear.

## Context

The Gospel according to Matthew was written by Matthew, the tax-collector who was converted and chosen to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Being of Jewish descent, his version of Jesus's life and ministry had a specific slant that focused on ethnic Jews. As a result, the biblical book that bears his name primarily targeted those who had been part of the Old Covenant system.<sup>4</sup>

Matthew's Jewish emphasis is seen in the opening chapter where Matthew reviews the genealogy that led to the arrival of Christ (Matt 1:1-17).<sup>5</sup> Knowing the need to explain the Messiah's worthiness before Jewish listeners,<sup>6</sup> Matthew displays God's providence in the family line of Jesus. Following the familial history, Matthew moves to the birth of Christ, explaining Jesus's arrival and the subsequent events that followed.

Matthew 3 opens with the ministry of John the Baptist, which directly correlates to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. At his baptism, God the Father proclaimed from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). The public affirmation from the Father propels the service of Jesus to the world. Following the temptation by Satan (Matt 4:1-11), "Jesus began to preach" (Matt 4:17).

After explaining the call of a few disciples in Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew describes Jesus's ministry. Chapters 5–7 reveal the wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount, as the Lord explained how his followers are to behave. Matthew 8–9 focus primarily on Jesus's work as Healer. Matthew uses the tales of healing to point to Jesus's divine

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew narrates his conversion and call in 9:9-13.

<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 83-98. Hendriksen details that Matthew is "Hebraistic" (83), and that the "purpose of this Gospel was fully to win the Jews for Christ; that is, to gain those still unconverted and to strengthen those already converted" (97).

<sup>5</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Schreiner, *Matthew, Disciple and Scribe: The First Gospel and Its Portrait of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 68-70. Schreiner points out the Jewish individuals Matthew chooses to affirm Jesus as the Messiah. He notes that Matthew was intentional in the names he chose to list, since the genealogy was missing multiple generations.

commission, because the Jewish audience would realize that only Yahweh has the power to mend broken bodies.

Chapter 10 describes the ministry of the twelve apostles, as Jesus tells them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (vv. 5-6). In chapters 11–12, Matthew notes resistance to the Lord’s ministry, reflecting that even though Jesus was devoted to seeking out those of Jewish descent, many leaders of his own tribe were questioning his authority.<sup>7</sup>

Illustrating Jesus’s magnificent ability to teach the masses, Matthew uses chapter 13 to list several parables. Chapters 14–20 expose the reality of Jesus as the promised Messiah through his insights as a teacher, his miracles,<sup>8</sup> the transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13), and Peter’s confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). Matthew is also careful to note multiple instances where Jesus prophesies his upcoming death and resurrection.<sup>9</sup>

The focus on Israel continues into chapters 21–23, where Matthew hones the focus to Jerusalem in particular. Jesus enters the City of David as a celebrated hero in Matthew 21. However, after his bold teaching and the onslaught of attacks by the religious leaders, by the end of chapter 23 Jesus was proclaiming “woes” to the Scribes and Pharisees (vv. 1-36) and mourning over the hard-heartedness of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Matt 12:14 explains that “the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.”

<sup>8</sup> Jesus multiplies food for his listeners, walks on the sea, and heals the sick in Matt 14 and 15.

<sup>9</sup> Jesus teaches that he will suffer, die, and rise again in Matt 16:21-23, Matt 17:22-23, and Matt 20:17-19.

<sup>10</sup> The Lord’s brokenness over his kinsmen is seen in Matt 23:37-39.

Chapter 24 begins a monumental passage in Matthew known as the Olivet Discourse.<sup>11</sup> In this section, Jesus foretells two cataclysmic events: the destruction of the Temple that would ultimately take place in AD 70, and his final, triumphant second coming that is to occur at the end of the age. Matthew 24:1-35 prophesies the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the Temple being destroyed.<sup>12</sup> Matthew 24:36 marks a major shift in the passage.<sup>13</sup> This turning point moves from the first century to the parousia—the victorious arrival of King Jesus that has yet to take place.<sup>14</sup>

### **Exegesis**

To analyze how Matthew exposes the imminence of the second coming, a study of 24:36-51 is necessary. The words in this passage come from the lips of Jesus, and the imminence of his second coming is the primary point in Matthew 24:36-51. The emphasis on its imminence is felt in the opening verse, but the teaching on Christ’s arrival is not an isolated discussion, and the second coming undergirds the entirety of Matthew’s Gospel. Exposing the immediacy of the parousia has a purpose, which is seen later in the chapter through the exhortations to “stay awake” (v. 42) and “be ready” (v. 44). The Lord’s

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<sup>11</sup> This section gets its name from Matt 24:3, where Matthew explains that Jesus sat down “on the Mount of Olives” and taught his disciples about the things that were to occur in the days ahead.

<sup>12</sup> Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2015), 229-81. Storms clarifies the meaning of this passage by exposing the figurative language of vv. 29-31, showing that the destruction of the Temple is in view. He explains that the fig tree example from vv. 32-35 refers to Jerusalem being overtaken and “this generation” (v. 34) is the immediate audience, those in the first century.

<sup>13</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 931-40. While there is much debate surrounding these verses and a detailed study is beyond the scope of this thesis, France is one scholar who makes a compelling argument that supports this interpretive division. By delineating Matthew’s specific use of *parousia*, and comparing the singular “But . . . that day” of v. 36 to the plural “those days” of vv. 19, 22, and 29 (among other arguments), France shows that vv. 1-35 connect to the destruction of the Temple, and v. 36 moves to describe the second coming.

<sup>14</sup> Even if one disagrees with the divisions made regarding the transition from the destruction of the Temple to the parousia, it is largely agreed that the second coming is addressed in v. 36 (if not earlier). Unless an extreme preterist position is taken (the idea that all the events in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in 70 AD) throughout chap. 24, most scholarship views v. 36 and following as still being in our future.

intention and application in these verses make a forceful impact when the disciples' earlier comments are remembered.

As Jesus began his lesson on the destruction of the Temple and his return in glory in Matthew 24, the disciples were curious. Jesus has pointed to the Temple, the center of Jewish society, and claimed that “there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (v. 2). This was quite shocking to the disciples, who considered the purposes of God encased in the physical place of worship. They were not understanding his teaching and they began to ask for clarification. In Matthew 24:3, they respond, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Jesus answered the first part of their question in verses 1-35 (the Temple's destruction), and in verse 36 he moves to respond to their second curiosity: how and when human history will be concluded.

Verses 1-35 offer tangible warnings for first-century Christians to know when the siege against Jerusalem would take place, and when they needed to “flee to the mountains” (Matt 24:16). The Lord is giving clues as to when the Romans would sack the Temple so that his people would have life-saving information. Just a few decades after his comments, the directives of Christ were heeded by his followers. History confirms that Christians remembered Jesus's words, because there was an exodus from Jerusalem just before Titus ransacked the holy city.<sup>15</sup>

In verse 36, Jesus explains that only God the Father is aware of the timing of his second coming. This statement directly contrasts with his approach in verses 1-35. While Jesus was eager to give a specific roadmap as to what eventually took place in AD 70, when it came to his cosmic reckoning, he would not offer a timeline. This lack of

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<sup>15</sup> John Gill, *Matthew to John*, Exposition of the Old and New Testaments, vol. 7 (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 289. Gill references historians Josephus and Eusebius. He explains that their work confirms a mass of Christians vacated the city of Jerusalem at the time of the Roman attack. Sam Storms is a modern scholar who notes the exodus of Christ-followers from Jerusalem. He writes, “These instructions were in fact followed by Christians in Judea and Jerusalem...in late 66, the Christian community, under the leadership of Symeon (a cousin of Jesus), withdrew to the village of Pella in Perea, a mountainous region east of the Sea of Galilee.” Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative*, 249.

insight granted to Jesus's human nature<sup>16</sup> and the little help this provided his listeners reveals the goal of God regarding the parousia: the timing is hidden.

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If neither Jesus nor the angels were informed of the hour of the second coming, then the disciples were to be unaware as well. Therefore, the Lord's arrival is imminent. No creature should think they are able to uncover the timing of Jesus's return, and the world should be constantly prepared for Christ's return.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus illustrates with an Old Testament example in verses 37-39. Pointing to Noah, the Lord reveals that there will not be anything drastically different in the day-to-day life of humanity before the final trumpet blast. Just as it was before the flood of Genesis 6-8, the second coming will be preceded by babies being born, couples getting married, laborers grinding away for their employers, and the world's pursuit of pleasure. In Noah's era, the day before the first raindrop was commonplace. There was nothing out of the ordinary, and humanity was not contemplating a worldwide catastrophe. Jesus is explaining that the same will be true the hour before he returns: daily life will be as usual, and much of mankind will be ignorant of the frailty of the moment.

However, utter sobriety hits in verse 39. Jesus reminds the audience of the destruction of the flood. While many people were living without a worry of eternal things, horror came in an instant. Before the flood, the concerns and passions of the temporal were the primary focus, and all such matters were worthless as soon as the water raged.

With the disciples listening (and Matthew recording), the seriousness of the

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<sup>16</sup> R. C. Sproul teaches that the key to understanding how the God-Man would not know such a fact comes from rightly comprehending the hypostatic union. He displays the interaction of Jesus's human nature and divine nature by stating, "the divine nature did not communicate everything to the human nature. So, when Jesus said he did not know the day and the hour of his coming, he was speaking with regards to his humanity." R. C. Sproul, *Matthew*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 708.

<sup>17</sup> The object of Jesus's lesson in Matt 24:36 was not to describe or minimize his omnipotence as the Son of God, but to expose the folly of anyone trying to time his second coming.

second coming is tied to the flood's destruction: "[As] they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt 24:39). The usage of Noah in this warning is connected to Matthew's background and his purpose in writing. The Jewish audience would know the flood narrative extremely well, so the analogy would be clearly understood.

As immediately as the flood arrived on the scene in Noah's day, the second coming and the consequences that accompany it will likewise consume the nations in a flash. And, no creature knows when that day will occur. Jesus is showing that since the next second may be the last of human history, everyone should be ready. The warning of the imminence of the second coming is an alarm of danger used to exhort mankind to stay on guard, and it ties into the "stay awake" of Matt 24:42 and "be ready" of Matt 24:44.

Another facet of Noah's story that correlates to Jesus's words was the indifference of the world to the warnings given by Noah. Noah was a prophet, and as he was preparing the ark in accordance with the Lord's prescription,<sup>18</sup> his work and his message were a warning to the masses. Peter refers to Noah as "a herald of righteousness" (2 Pet 2:5) and reflects the nature of Noah's ministry: living for Yahweh and preaching about imminent judgment. But, as Noah's message was ignored by the carnal world, the warnings of the second coming will be mocked as well.

In verses 40 and 41, Jesus illustrates the imminence of his arrival by showing how the commonality of life will be uprooted. He also raises the consequences for those who are not prepared. Using examples of two men in a field and two women grinding at a mill, he explains that in both cases "one will be taken and one left."<sup>19</sup> In these stories, those who labor are separated, which is an allusion to the division that will take place between

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<sup>18</sup> Gen 6 details the dimensions of the vessel Noah constructed.

<sup>19</sup> This is stated in both Matt 24:40 and Matt 24:41.

God's people and the unregenerate when the Lord returns.<sup>20</sup> Staying in the theme of the ordinary, the stories describe typical individuals going about their duties, when suddenly they face the consequences of Christ's return.<sup>21</sup>

Since the Lord's arrival will sneak up on the world, and because the timing is unspecified, all who hear the words of Christ should "stay awake" (Matt 24:42). Jesus is applying what is being explained. He is surely returning, his return will happen during the normal course of life, and many will be shocked. Therefore, do not slumber, and be watchful.

The Lord uses hyperbole as he presses the point in verses 43 and 44. He leads his listeners to consider a thief's arrival at a home. Obviously, if the thief is successful in acquiring the homeowner's goods, he did so with stealth. He did not announce his arrival, and he would not send a letter informing the residents of his plans to plunder their residence. If he had notified the owner of the house that he planned to break in, then the owner would not have allowed him to steal his goods. The homeowner would have been at the door, ready for this intruder, and would have reached out to local law enforcement.

This is the reason homeowners lock their doors. They do not know when a thief may strike, so they stay prepared. With this reality made plain, Jesus then connects the parable of the thief to his disciples in verse 44: "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The fullness of what is to occur at the second coming, with specific emphasis placed on the final judgment, is discussed in detail in chap. 3 of this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> D. A. Carson explains that Jesus's words magnify "the unexpectedness of the event by means of the sudden cleavage." D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 571. The purpose of these pictures is to expose the imminence of Christ's return and the way in which many will be surprised by his advent.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding this section of Matthew, Hendriksen writes, "Common to all these passages is the idea of suddenness and unexpectedness of the coming, and consequently the danger of unpreparedness." Hendriksen, *Matthew*, 871. Jesus's message is that his return will be imminent, and people should be ready. There will be no warning, so the world should be on guard at all times.

After explaining the mundane nature of life at the time of his arrival, Jesus then urges his people to be faithful in the interim while also issuing a warning for the lost. Verses 45-49 tell a story of servants placed in charge of a master's estate. The listeners would have understood that a servant's duty is to follow the master's decrees. But in this tale, the ungodly servant ignores his responsibility. He minimizes his master's authority, forgets the owner's power, and loses awareness of the imminence of the master's return. Because he was not meditating on his leader's arrival, the wicked servant behaves corruptly. He spurns the rules of his master and does as he pleases, resulting in a failure of stewardship. Instead of feeding and shepherding those under his care, he abuses them and does what satisfies himself.<sup>23</sup>

Due to his waywardness as an overseer, there are consequences awaiting the servant. Verses 50 and 51 reveal the master's quick arrival and the fury that takes place. While the corrupt servant is actively pursuing debauchery, the master suddenly appears. The owner returns home to "cut him in pieces" (Matt 24:50). This language amplifies the severity of the servant's punishment, words that would be fully grasped by the original audience.<sup>24</sup> On a larger scale, Jesus is describing the damnation of the unconverted, which becomes evident in the second half of verse 51. He explains that the wicked servant will be "with the hypocrites" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." This verbiage is symbolic of the fires of hell, inflating the consequences for those who are caught off guard at the second coming.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Matt 24:45 notes that the servant was called to feed the household, but Matt 24:49 explains he chose to hurt them and run off to indulge his own fleshly appetites.

<sup>24</sup> John MacArthur explains, "The phrase, 'cut . . . in pieces' is from *dichotomeo* and literally means to cut into two parts. It is used in that strict sense in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in regard to the preparation of an animal sacrifice (Exod 29:17). To Jews it would therefore carry the unmistakable idea of destruction and death." John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 79.

<sup>25</sup> Judgment and the eternity of the lake of fire is studied in detail in chap. 3 of this thesis.

## Conclusion

The verdict from Jesus's message in Matthew 24:36-51 is that the timing of the second coming is concealed, and it could occur at any minute. Therefore, be watchful for his return. This is the essence of the imminence of the parousia. Since the date is unknown to humanity, there will be nothing out of the ordinary before the Lord descends from heaven, and because the moment of this day is getting closer, live with a gaze on the everlasting. For the glory of Christ's return may be manifest this very hour.

Matthew highlights Jesus's words to remind the reader of the speed and the significance of the second coming. When Jesus comes again, there will be a reckoning. The physical destruction described in Matthew 24 points to spiritual realities, specifically the condemnation that will be felt by all who were not trusting in God,<sup>26</sup> and this is sobering news.

Matthew 24:36-51 should move the reader. The words of Christ touched his disciples, and those reading the biblical text should allow these realities to wash over their minds. Matthew makes it clear that the heavens could open in an instant, and when they do, all of humanity will see the King in his power. Therefore, all should "be ready" and the world must "stay awake."<sup>27</sup>

The correlation of Matthew 24 to preaching with urgency is palpable. Since Jesus teaches that his arrival is imminent, preachers must proclaim the Word in earnest. Because the Master warns that the world is to be ready, preachers must prepare the masses, and this happens when listeners are warned of the imminence of the second coming.

Preaching should expose the fleeting nature of life, the brevity of this era, and must urge the lost to come to saving faith. When a man preaches with such a fire, his messages are filled with reminders to gaze on the world to come. Such a burden is birthed from passages like Matthew 24. If a preacher can read Matthew 24:36-51 and not be set

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<sup>26</sup> Chap. 3 of this thesis elaborates further on these topics.

<sup>27</sup> These were the warnings from Matt 24:44 and Matt 24:42, respectively.

ablaze to herald God's message, then he has missed the weight of the passage or has failed to allow the Bible to transform his thinking.

### **First Peter 4:7-5:4**

The apostle Peter's call to join the Lord's work is legendary. Luke 5 details how Christ summoned him out of the fishing trade to become a fisher of men. God's hand on Peter's life is evident throughout the New Testament and in church history, continuing into the biblical canon. Peter's role was launched to a new dimension following Pentecost,<sup>28</sup> and two of his letters are found in the New Testament.

Peter's intimacy with the Savior allows his ministry to have a distinct perspective. His service also provides special insights into preaching the Word, as he was a herald of the gospel in his day.<sup>29</sup> His personality, convictions, and experiences directly translate to his pastoral ministry and the letters he sent to local congregations.

The first letter of Peter displays the apostle's fellowship with Jesus, his love of the church, and his passion to share God's truth. As a result, Peter expresses the need for Christ-followers to live as holy sojourners, admonishing his listeners toward piety due to the imminence of Christ's return. In 1 Peter 4:7-5:4, Peter implores his audience to live for eternity and uses the second coming (the believer's union with Jesus) as a reason to hope during trials.

Peter's emphasis on the imminence of Jesus's arrival and his unction to labor in the light of the second coming provide a model for the modern preacher. First Peter 4:7-5:4 shows the imminence of the parousia and displays that Christians are encouraged and propelled to faithfulness when reminded of Christ's imminent return. By analyzing the passage in detail, the need to preach with urgency is unmistakable.

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<sup>28</sup> Acts 2 displays the Spirit's empowering Peter to preach the gospel and minister to the church in a spectacular way.

<sup>29</sup> The book of Acts tells of Peter's gifting as a preacher. The first half of Acts is a testimony of Peter's proclaiming the glories of Christ throughout the known world.

## Context

First Peter opens with the apostle's greeting, where he lists the recipients of the letter. The original readers were "elect exiles" (1:1) who were scattered around the Roman Empire. Peter affirms their status as saints, celebrating their redemption through the work of Christ. He explains that they were chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ" (1:2). They were set apart by the sovereign grace of God so that they would glorify him in obedience, through the power of the Spirit. He was hopeful yet confident that his letter would bless all those who read it.<sup>30</sup>

Historians have wrestled over the date of 1 Peter, but most scholarship locates Peter's writing in Nero's reign, placing the letter between AD 54 and 68.<sup>31</sup> The churches listed in the opening lines would have been made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers.<sup>32</sup> The reality of Gentiles in attendance is confirmed in chapter 1 verse 14, where Peter exhorts the members to "not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance."<sup>33</sup>

A major theme of 1 Peter is faithfully enduring persecution. Throughout the letter, Peter urges his readers to cling to Christ while they suffer and to see their pain as momentary in the light of eternity. First Peter is an instruction manual on living for Jesus when the days are hard. He presses Christians to remember the bliss of glorification, which will be at the second coming. With the victorious return of Christ in view, Peter

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<sup>30</sup> The end of 1 Pet 1:2 reads, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you."

<sup>31</sup> Davids comments on the widespread agreement that the letter was written at some point during this time period. Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 9-11. For example, Kistemaker places the letter within those dates. He notes, "The internal evidence of the epistle...seems to point to the time of Nero." Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Kistemaker notes the Old Testament references in 1 Peter, along with multiple verses relating to Gentiles. Therefore, it would seem to indicate a diverse audience. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude*, 16-17.

<sup>33</sup> Peter makes similar points regarding non-Jews later in the letter, such as in chap. 4. He comments on the "Gentiles . . . flood of debauchery" (vv. 3-4). Such language would not have made sense to an entirely Jewish audience because Jews were not known for open immorality.

leads those under his care to flee from sin and chase righteousness. Both hope and holiness are preached in connection with the parousia, and this word comes during times of suffering for God's people.

The form of persecution facing the church is not clear from the letter itself. Most likely, the suffering was animosity from non-believers that the Christians encountered in everyday life. In chapter 4 verse 4, Peter encourages the Christ-followers when he notes that the pagans "are surprised when you do not join them in the . . .flood of debauchery, and they malign you." Such slander or mockery is probably the major source of the church's problems at this time.<sup>34</sup> However, regardless of the difficulties of the day, the point of Peter's message is to hold fast and live for Jesus<sup>35</sup> because the King is returning to rescue his own, and the fullness of salvation will be realized. Also, in that moment, when the new heavens and the new earth are inaugurated, living for Christ will be all that matters.

The emphasis on staying faithful through trials is part of Peter's purpose in calling his friends "elect exiles" (1:1). By choosing such a phrase in his opening remarks, Peter is imploring readers to see through everlasting lenses. He wants those he loves to cling to the hope of the future glory that will be revealed, and he wants them aware of eternity as he begins the letter. By referring to those scattered across the known world as beloved aliens, it is a reminder that, by God's grace, no place this side of heaven is the Christian's ultimate place of rest. Those who love Christ will be outsiders in this world until he returns,<sup>36</sup> which intensifies the eternal focus of Peter's letter and

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<sup>34</sup> Being slandered and reviled by opponents of the gospel is addressed elsewhere in 1 Peter, such as 3:16-17.

<sup>35</sup> First Pet 2:18-20 encourages those who suffer under unjust masters, exhorting the godly to honor their earthly authorities. V. 20 mentions being "beaten," so some commentators note that there may have been physical persecution as well. The threats facing the church in the Roman Empire, and during Nero's reign specifically, are well-documented. No matter the level of opposition facing the beloved, Peter's teaching remains the same.

<sup>36</sup> Warren Wiersbe explains, "These people were citizens of heaven through faith in Christ (Phil. 3:20) and therefore were not permanent residents on earth . . . because Christians are 'strangers' in

ministry.<sup>37</sup>

First Peter 1:3-12 continues to proclaim the beauty of salvation and tells of the joy that awaits the church. Verse 4 notes the “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” For those who have been chosen, those who will dwell in this celestial abode, the good news is that they are “being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:5). In verse 12, Peter puts the magnificence of being saved and sealed by the love of the triune God in perspective. He explains that the treasures of the gospel are so remarkable that they are “things into which angels long to look.” Peter exclaims the glories of eternity to encourage the beloved to endure hardships.

Verses 6-7 explain that the trials faced in life are testing and strengthening the Christian’s faith. When the believer lives through the pains of life, as they are kept faithful by the Spirit of God during intense persecution, the result is “praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” The “revelation of Jesus Christ” in verse 7 is referring to the second coming.<sup>38</sup> Peter teaches that when the Son of God descends in power, the world will be awakened to his majesty and the church will rise and celebrate the fullness of their salvation. Verse 5 tells the same story, as Peter notes that salvation will be

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the world, they are considered to be ‘strange’ in the eyes of the world (1 Peter 4:4).” Warren W. Wiersbe, *Ephesians-Revelation*, The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, vol. 2 (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2008), 389.

<sup>37</sup> J. Daryl Charles connects the grace of God in election to the situation in Asia Minor and the theme of Peter’s writing. He unites the Lord’s eternal favor on those who were suffering with the call to steadfastness. Charles writes, “In order for the readers of 1 Peter to fulfill their responsibilities-to persevere in the face of adversity and cultural hostility-they must be anchored in an awareness that they are the elect of God, the recipients of noteworthy grace (1:2; 5:12).” J. Daryl Charles, *1 Peter*, in vol. 13 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 298.

<sup>38</sup> John Calvin writes, “At the appearing of Jesus Christ, or when Jesus Christ shall be revealed. This is added, that the faithful might learn to hold on courageously to the last day. For our life is now hidden in Christ, and will remain hidden, and as it were buried, until Christ shall appear from heaven.” John Calvin, *1 Peter, Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 34.

“revealed in the last time.”<sup>39</sup> The imperatives are weighty because of the urgency with which Peter writes. His earnestness comes from an awareness of the imminence of the second coming. Peter is passionately reminding those under his care that the arrival of Christ is imminent.

With the riches of the gospel exposed, Peter makes a shift in verse 13. “Therefore,” he notes, all of God’s people are to live pure lives. Since God has redeemed a specific people and because he is returning to bring them to their eternal home, his chosen ones must obey the Master, doing all they can to make much of the Lord. He reiterates living with the goal of Christ’s appearing in verse 13: “Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Peter continues to connect hope during pain and living with purity to the imminence of the second coming.<sup>40</sup>

Verses 14-25 of chapter 1 explain the practicalities of what it looks like to live in the light of eternity, and the focus is on Christ-like holiness.<sup>41</sup> Because of the goodness of God seen in the gospel, those redeemed by Jesus’s blood should honor him. By doing so, they are living with a gaze on the age to come. Verse 22 provides specificity, challenging believers to authentic devotion to one another. Peter writes, “Love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” When the gospel is comprehended and the imminence of Christ’s return is understood, believers are eager to love the family of God.

In chapter 2, Peter progresses the exhortation to live sanctified. He encourages the church to crave the “spiritual milk” (1 Pet 2:2) of their faith, so that they may grow into spiritual adulthood. Verse 9 joins the theme of God’s sovereignty in salvation, and Peter

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Luther explains that this phrase is describing the second coming (and its imminence) when he comments on v. 5: “The inheritance appointed for them was long ago acquired, and it was prepared from the foundation of the world. But now it is hidden, as yet covered, reserved and sealed. But this is only for a little while, when in a moment it shall be opened and revealed, so that we shall behold it . . . however in due time it will, in the twinkling of an eye, be opened and uncovered so that you may view it forever.” Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 65-66. Davids states that Peter is addressing the return of Christ in v. 13 and lists glorious benefits awaiting the believer when the Lord descends from heaven.

<sup>41</sup> First Pet 1:15 states, “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”

states that Christians were saved to “proclaim the excellencies” of the Lord. Verses 11-12 link to Peter’s term “exiles,” informing the readers that as they wander as strangers in the world, they are to be above reproach so that God may be glorified “on the day of visitation.” In verses 13-25, Peter expresses the need for Christians to submit to all those in positions of authority. By doing so, Peter is stressing the need for a lifestyle of holiness wherein God’s people are committed to glorifying him in every facet of life. In addition, he connects the encompassing charge of glorifying the Lord in all things to the parousia.

The phrase “day of visitation” in verse 12 is a different way that Peter describes the second coming of Christ.<sup>42</sup> In chapter 2, Peter teaches that the unconverted are watching the activities of Christ-followers, and therefore God’s people must live reverently. Peter’s motivation for doing so is God’s glory at Jesus’s appearing. Because, at his arrival, the watching unbelievers will “see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12).

Peter’s words in chapter 2 are another example of the second coming of Christ (and its imminence) used as motivation to uprightness. Peter is not lax and does not assume that Jesus will be gone for millennia. Rather, he writes as though the Lord’s return could take place at any moment. The pressing need of the hour was that the churches in Asia Minor, who were facing trials, would devote themselves to living honorably. This was not a casual recommendation by Peter. He was writing to move them to immediate action.

Chapter 3 opens with counsel for marriage, and verses 8-22 provide sustenance in the face of opposition. Peter again uses the example of Jesus, his sufferings, and his honor as reasons to hold fast when enemies attack. Chapter 3 ends with encouragement from Christ’s sovereign power. In verse 22, Peter proclaims that King Jesus “is at the

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<sup>42</sup> R. C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 76-78. While there is some disagreement as to Peter’s meaning of “day of visitation” in v. 12, Sproul believes it is the parousia. He connects the Old Testament usage of the phrase and the Greek military understanding of a supervisor who “would drop in unannounced . . . when he arrives, what will he find?” Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, 77-78.

right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” King Jesus is on the throne, so Christians can stand firm through the most intense pain. Their hope is in their Master, as he will return and conquer the cosmos.

Incentive to live with an eternal perspective is expounded in chapter 4 verses 1-6. Following Jesus’s example, the Christian should not spend his days indulging the flesh but should live “for the will of God” (1 Pet 4:2), even during difficult seasons. While the lost world is obsessed with wickedness, the Christian should meditate on spiritual matters. Because, the day is coming when the world will “give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Pet 4:5).<sup>43</sup> Peter is tenacious as he preaches on the need to be holy while addressing the brevity of human history.

### **Exegesis**

With a background of 1 Peter and the first few chapters addressed, an exegesis of 1 Peter 4:7-5:4 further reveals Peter’s emphasis on the imminence of Christ’s return and its impact on the Christian life. This passage is bracketed by the gravity of the second coming of Christ. In chapter 4 verse 7, Peter addresses the end of the world, and in chapter 5 verse 4 he clarifies that this conclusion of the age is when “the chief Shepherd appears.” Each exhortation within this section is motivated because of the reality of Jesus’s return, and the entirety of the counsel given between chapter 4 verse 7 and chapter 5 verse 4 is centered on the glory of Christ’s second advent. Judgment, hope, freedom from trial, and the blessed reward for believers all shine in the light of the imminence of the second coming.

The chief Shepherd’s arrival is the burden on Peter’s mind. Since Jesus is coming, and because it may be today, Peter labors to remind readers of the need to live for the Lord. By understanding Peter’s intention in this passage (as well as in the entirety

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<sup>43</sup> The account that all of humanity will give on the final day is discussed more deeply in chap. 3 of this thesis.

of the letter), the book's clarity is brought to light.<sup>44</sup>

When the language in these verses is paired with the other statements Peter uses regarding the parousia, there is no question that he is describing Christ's return. In addition, Peter warns that the magnificence of that day, "the end of all things,"<sup>45</sup> is on the doorstep. Not only is Peter motivated to lead the churches in Asia Minor because of the day of judgment, where all of man's deeds are put on display,<sup>46</sup> but he is urgent because he does not know the hour of the Lord's arrival. He wants to be found faithful, and he longs for those he oversees to be equipped for King Jesus.

The second half of verse 7, "The end of all things *is at hand*," solidifies Peter's perspective, and the weight of such a phrase is unmistakable. Peter is urging that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent. Throughout the letter, Peter has addressed the second coming in different terminology. But, in chapter 4 verse 7, the focus of the parousia is its imminence. Further proof of Peter's urgency is when verse 7 is connected to verse 5, when the apostle warns that God is "ready to judge the living and the dead." The culmination of all the acts of creation will be judged, and the Lord of hosts is preparing his reckoning. This is sobering and is what Peter is using to propel his readers to live a life devoted to Christ.<sup>47</sup>

First Peter 4:7 continues with the call to action. Because the end is imminent, "therefore," one should live in control of his actions and live soberly. Said differently, when thinking about the second coming of Christ, priorities are transformed. Living in the light of eternity immediately brings sobriety. Temporal matters fall away, and

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<sup>44</sup> Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 14-17. Davids writes, "The whole of 1 Peter is characterized by an eschatological, even an apocalyptic focus." Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> This is the first half of 1 Pet 4:7.

<sup>46</sup> More discussion regarding what takes place at the second coming is in chap. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin affirms this interpretation: "Hence the Apostle, that he might rouse them from the drowsiness of the flesh, reminds them that the end of all things was nigh . . . he does not, at the same time, speak only of the end of individuals, but of the universal renovation of the world; as though he had said, 'Christ will shortly come, who will put an end to all things.'" Calvin, *1 Peter*, 127.

everlasting goals flood the believer's mind. When Christ-followers are self-controlled and sober in their daily lives, their intimacy with Jesus will be catapulted to a different level, resulting in devoted prayer, which is how Peter closes verse 7.

First Peter 4:8-9 reminds the reader of what was stated in chapter 1, the need for brotherly love and generosity among fellow believers. When men and women of God are consumed with the imminence of eternity, the menial issues fall away. Temporal spats are evaporated, and the glory of Christ, the bliss of eternity, and the mission to proclaim him in the nations reign paramount. Such a posture among the beloved will be embraced delightfully and “without grumbling.”<sup>48</sup>

In verses 10 and 11 of chapter 4, Peter moves to mention the need to exercise the spiritual gifts given to each Christian. The apostle Paul teaches that the gifts from God are for the church and are not for personal gain.<sup>49</sup> Peter is explaining the same reality. It does not matter how each person is gifted, the important factor is that each person serves for the good of his brothers and sisters and for the renown of the triune God.

Peter notes the stewardship of spiritual gifts in verse 10. The steward is a manager of what has been entrusted to him by the Master. In God's economy he distills the abilities as he sees fit, and the summons is to “serve by the strength that God supplies” (1 Pet 4:11). God providentially allots each congregation exactly what it needs in a remarkable tapestry of giftings. When done appropriately, each member of the group serves in the proper position and role, and God is glorified. Peter is moved by this reality and closes verse 11 with a doxology of the majesty of the Lord in caring for his church.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> This is the end of 1 Pet 4:9.

<sup>49</sup> Paul explains spiritual gifts in Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12–14. He teaches that God's people should exercise these Spirit-wrought abilities in a fashion that edifies others and their congregations.

<sup>50</sup> Kistemaker marks this praise as Peter magnifying Jesus's divinity. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude*, 170-71.

Once again, the stewardship of gifts in 10-11 are part of the bigger purpose in 4:7–5:4. The context is the imminence of the second coming. Therefore, as those gifted by the Spirit to serve the church, each flock must be diligent in stewarding their specific calling because the day of assessment is at hand and each member should look to be found faithful under the watching eye of God. Not only will the Lord be praised for his work in each believer and their service, but each saint will receive blessing for their faithful oversight of the call placed on their life. Not a moment should be wasted in the King’s service.

Following the outburst of praise in verse 11, Peter reiterates the need to see suffering through the scope of eternity in verses 12-19. The opening title from 1:1, “elect exiles,” is essential to remember at this point in the letter. Throughout his writing Peter has gone to great lengths to remind the readers that they are visitors on the earth. This abode is not their home; therefore, it will be uncomfortable at times.

Verse 12 states that the pain of life is a test used by the Lord to sanctify Christians. Peter, preaching with an eternal perspective, goes so far as to tell the church to rejoice during hardship. Verse 14 reminds the reader that insults on Christ’s behalf are something to be grateful for and should not be a surprise. As Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you . . . if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18-20). First Peter 4:16 encourages persecuted believers to be bold and to glorify God. For those suffering for the sake of righteousness<sup>51</sup> it is encouragement that the slave is beginning to look like the Master.

How can Peter teach that a Christian should rejoice during pain? Only by gripping the fullness of the second coming. When Jesus Christ appears, any suffering for his sake will be paid back with interest. This is the truth that explodes in verse 13. If the believers can cling to him during difficulty, if they can find hope meditating on his

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<sup>51</sup> In 1 Pet 4:15, Peter quickly states that the suffering he is referring to is pain because of devotion to Christ, not trials brought on by a sinful lifestyle.

imminent rescue, then they will “rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” This is the daily reminder the church needs to face oppression. Jesus is coming back, and when he does, all will be made right. The Christian should not give up but should hold fast and give his last breath for God’s sake.

Verses 17 and 18 connect the edifying nature of temporal pain to the eternal horrors of those who do not know Christ. The “judgment” of verse 17 describes the purifying nature of God’s work. All that takes place in believers’ lives furthers their holiness and his sovereign hand watches over those he loves. This temporal pain will be turned to celebration at the return of Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Peter confronts the trouble for the unregenerate in 4:18. While the suffering of this life will be relieved in the eternity of the Christ-follower, for those who die in their carnal state, this world is the best they will ever encounter. The fires of damnation rage and will consume the wicked for all time. Realizing this should cause Christians to fall on their faces in worship for their own salvation, weep over the souls of the lost, and sprint to herald the gospel to the world.

God’s sovereignty in election from chapter 1 is the bedrock for the close of chapter 4. In verse 19, after encouraging the Christian to suffer well in the light of the second coming, Peter continues by saying that the suffering of God is under the authority of their Savior. 3:22 confirmed that King Jesus reigns, and this loving Lord will not allow anything to overtake his beloved.<sup>53</sup> He is orchestrating all things for the good of his chosen ones and the glory of his name.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Charles clarifies the nature of the “judgment” in v. 17 and how it describes the divide between the saved and the lost on judgment day. He notes, “Judgment will be indescribably cataclysmic for the unbeliever. For this reason persecution, which purifies, will result in the saints’ vindication, sparing them the awesome fate that awaits those who carry out the persecution.” Charles, *1 Peter*, 350.

<sup>53</sup> Paul reiterates this in 1 Cor 10:13 and encourages the believer that “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

<sup>54</sup> Rom 8:28 explains that “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

In chapter 5, Peter makes another transition. After beginning the section with the fleeting nature of this era and urging the church to suffer well and live in the light of the second coming, Peter then addresses pastors. Since the weight of eternity hangs in the balance, because the days are difficult, and due to the imminence of King Jesus's advent, pastors should "shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1 Pet 5:2).

This exhortation only makes sense when the weight of Peter's language throughout the book is considered. In 5:1, Peter explains that he is a fellow participant in trials and in the "glory that is going to be revealed." When is this revelation? At the day of Christ Jesus. With the parousia in view, he charges preachers: labor well, brothers.

Verses 2-3 explain what it looks like to work diligently for the good of the church and the glory of God. Peter uses the term "shepherd" to illustrate the loving nature of the leadership. Pastors should not be greedy but should model Christ-like behavior before the watching flock. Leading by example, elders should serve with joy and excitement because there is no greater privilege than to protect those for whom Christ died.

The standard is set extremely high by the apostle in this passage because of the importance of Christ's return. Verse 4 grounds motivation to shepherd the bride of Christ in a noble goal: the reward at the second coming of Christ. When the King returns, he will beckon all those who cared for his beloved, and each man will be put on display for all of creation to see. The bridegroom is only away for a short period, and when he returns in glory, those given the responsibility of caring for those he loves will be assessed.<sup>55</sup> Works and motivations will be tested, and those who labored well will be rewarded handsomely.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The minister's day of assessment is unpacked in chap. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Sproul addresses the sobriety of stewardship from these verses: "God in Christ is going to bestow a crown upon his servants who feed his sheep, that is, if they execute the office according to the Word of God." Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, 184.

## **Conclusion**

After a study of 1 Peter 4:7-5:4, it is evident that the apostle Peter was zealous in articulating the imminence of the second coming. Not only in these verses, but the foundation of the letter was the imminence of Jesus's return, and what that meant for the body of Christ. For those in the first century, the sustenance in trials and the motivation to piety was the news of the Savior's arrival. The same is true for believers today.

Peter encouraged a struggling people that their rescue was on the horizon, and they must stand firm during opposition. While battles against the church raged in multiple forms in the Roman Empire, Peter pointed God's chosen ones to the union with Christ that was drawing closer. In just a moment, Peter explained, their faith would be made sight. The troubles of the season would be gone, and Jesus would be realized. There would be no more sin and no more crying. Their Conqueror was on the way and they could have hope.

Peter also used the imminence of the second coming to propel God's people to holy living. He preached as a man on a mission, striving to see believers living as ambassadors in a foreign country. He wanted the church to be peculiar in their era, and he implored the need for holiness in the people of God. Such teaching is proof of a man centered on eternity, and the words he writes are the overflow of a heart consumed with the heavenly realm.

Therefore, there are consequences for preachers because of 1 Peter 4:7-5:4. Those called to shepherd the flock of God must proclaim, and they must do so in earnest. With sights set on heaven, preachers should herald the good news to their congregations. Because of the imminence of the second coming, believers can be filled with hope because of the coming union with Christ, strengthened during hardship, and challenged to flee sin. This begins in the pulpit. Peter exemplifies what it means to preach with urgency, and he equips the bride of Christ to suffer with confidence and to rid themselves of worldliness. The modern preacher would do well to embody the same posture in his ministry.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE JUDGMENT AT CHRIST'S RETURN

With the imminence of Christ's return established, this chapter reveals the nature of the second coming and what will take place on that day. This thesis shows why the imminence of Christ's arrival is important, and how knowledge of the imminence of the parousia necessitates urgency in preaching. When Jesus returns, he will judge the world and usher in the eternal state.

A misunderstanding of what will occur at the second coming will inhibit one's ability to appreciate its gravity, resulting in temporal perspectives. Any thinking that is consumed with this world is devastating to preaching. It is essential that preachers know what Christ's return means for them and their congregations, and then they are to proclaim God's truth accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament teaches that there will be one public event with judgment for believers and the unregenerate when Jesus returns. In this public assessment, the Master will grant eternal rewards to the beloved and will disperse degrees of wrath for those heading to everlasting hell. Christ-followers will receive the fullness of their salvation, their faith will be sight, and the lost will be damned. Following the public reckoning, Jesus will inaugurate the new heavens and the new earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Space in this thesis limits a thorough critique of opposing views regarding the imminent judgment that awaits all mankind. While faithful Christians disagree in this area, one purpose of this section, while not addressed directly, is to reject the notion that Jesus's return will be a "secret Rapture." Some affirm the imminence of Christ's return, but their definition of Christ's arrival is the idea of a hidden removal of believers. The position of this thesis is that the second coming is a visible, glorious return of King Jesus to save his people and judge the world. At his advent, he will rescue his beloved and will bestow everlasting benefits on them, while destroying his enemies. Following his public appearing, he will commence the eternal age.

Matthew 25:31-46 and John 5:25-29 describe the day of judgment before the Almighty and the consequences that follow. These passages show that there is one assessment for all of mankind, and the designations given to each creature are immediately enforced. These passages also confirm that the judgment and each person's eternal destiny coincide with the moment of Christ's return. With these details exposed, the weighty nature of the second coming is illuminated.

Second Corinthians 5:1-10 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-15 show that the final judgment is for both the Christian and the unbeliever. Stated differently, the final assessment is not just for damnation. Rather, the day of judgment is for the redeemed as well as for the unconverted. Christ-followers will have their stewardship tested, and their eternity will be shaped by their fidelity to King Jesus. The believer will stand before God as a beloved child, but one's eternal responsibility will be linked to their faithfulness while on earth. Those outside of Christ will receive gradations of punishment according to the heinousness of their lives.

One purpose of this section is to show that choices made in life are eternally important, even for the beloved. After conversion, Christians are called to obedience, and their actions have consequences. Salvation is solely by the grace of God, received through faith in Christ alone, but Christians are redeemed for a purpose, and should not live flippantly. Following regeneration, God's people are summoned to spend the entirety of their days for the glory of God. The day of judgment will be the instance where eternal duties are tied to how each person spent their time on earth. Therefore, the preacher should live in the light of eternity, preaching urgently to lead laypeople to do the same.

Application for preaching is tethered to the described events of the parousia. Because Christ's return is imminent, and since this day is accompanied by grave consequences, preachers must grasp the fleeting nature of life and yearn to enliven their listeners. The lost must be warned and the Christian should be encouraged to live obediently, striving for eternal reward. Not only will congregants stand before the Lord,

but each preacher will face his Maker and his ministry will be judged.

In this chapter, both the bliss of everlasting joy and the horrors of infinite punishment in hell are displayed. The aftermath of the second coming and what it means for all of humanity is presented. With such concerns exposed from the New Testament, the impulse to preach in earnest is evident.

### **Matthew 25:31-46**

The compilation of Jesus's words in Matthew 25:31-46 is one of the most direct explanations of what will take place at the second coming in the entirety of the New Testament. These verses describe the judgment that is attached to the parousia. The final judgment is a single event that occurs with Christ's return, and that there is no delay following the public accounting. What is decided at the judgment is then immediately enforced.

A major facet of this analysis is the eternity of hell. The righteous vengeance of God against sin is detailed, which should leave the reader feeling the heaviness of judgment day. With this information exposed, the preacher is moved to proclaim the Word. In addition, with a vision of the terror that awaits the lost, the burden to preach with urgency is clear.

### **Context**

The background and introductory material of the Gospel according to Matthew was detailed in chapter 2 of this thesis. Matthew 25:31-46 follows shortly after 24:36-51, the passage analyzed in chapter 1 to evidence the imminence of Christ's return. As was shown, Jesus warned of his imminent arrival and explained that no creature would be able to decipher when the second coming would occur. Therefore, since he could descend at any second, the world must be prepared.<sup>2</sup>

Matthew 25:1-30 plays an important role in connecting the imminence of

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<sup>2</sup> See chap. 2 of this thesis for a thorough explanation of the background and context of Matthew.

Christ's return with the judgment that will occur at Christ's return. The opening verses of Matthew 25 consist of two parables given by Jesus. These stories serve as a bridge between his teaching that he will return at any moment and his instruction that there will be a day of reckoning when he arrives. Each parable plays a specific role in Jesus's message, and an overview of these lessons will display the weight of the passage.

Matthew 25:1-13 is the first of the two parables, and in this story, Jesus describes ten virgins who were preparing to meet a bridegroom. Each of these women were carrying a lamp in order to participate in the marriage celebration.<sup>3</sup> To keep the fires in the lamps burning, each girl needed oil. Verses 3-4 state, "When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps."

Jesus was teaching that the wise young lady was prepared. The foolish virgin came without enough oil for her flame, thinking only in the short-term. The wise virgin, thinking with a broader perspective, wanted to ensure she had plenty of oil to keep her light shining bright so that she could faithfully fulfill her duty. She was eager for the event and wanted to be ready.<sup>4</sup>

The decisions regarding the oil prove to have consequences later in the story. Verse 5 notes that the bridegroom was not arriving as soon as some had previously thought. Because of this, "they all became drowsy and slept." But out of nowhere, while deep in sleep, they were awakened. Verses 6-7 explain that as the groom appeared, the ladies scampered to get ready. Excited, the young women begin preparing their torches for the ceremony.

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<sup>3</sup> Mark E. Ross explains that these young women are not waiting as "potential brides, but as the friends of the bride. They have been invited to the wedding feast and are expecting to join in the festivities. The bride herself is not mentioned in this parable, and that should not be a matter of concern or speculation for us. The point of the parable does not concern the bride, but those who will be admitted to the marriage feast." Mark E. Ross, *Matthew*, Let's Study Series (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 247.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Sean O'Donnell explains the significance of the lamp: "This was obviously an act of obedience. They had a part to play in the wedding (likely providing light for the bridal party procession), and they were ready to play that part when the groom arrived." Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, Preaching the Word New Testament Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 730.

However, because the man arrived later than the girls had planned, the lamps were beginning to go dim. More oil was needed in each lamp. Due to the lack of preparedness of some, not every girl had enough fuel to keep their flames burning.<sup>5</sup> Verses 8-9 detail the interaction that took place between those with oil and those needing more. The unwise virgins demanded to have part of the wise virgins' share, but their request was refused. The girls with oil reminded the others that salesmen had oil available and directed the unwise ladies to "go to the dealers and buy for yourselves." Though, as the girls were shopping for oil, the bridegroom arrived. Upon his arrival, there was a celebration. Verse 10 describes the ceremony that took place, one of joy and feasting. The wise virgins, those who had carried additional oil, were included in the party, and there was collective revelry. The union was official, and they sat as guests in the marriage feast.

While there was rejoicing for the wise ladies, verses 11-12 show the consequences for failing to be prepared. The unwise virgins, those who had thought in the temporal, came back after the wedding festivities had begun. Knocking on the door and pleading for entrance into the home, the groom responded, "I do not know you."<sup>6</sup> The foolish women were refused entrance into the wedding, one in which they were supposed to have an active role. The gravity of the groom's words was part of Jesus's intentional approach to feed his listeners' souls. He wants the world to be ready for his second coming. This is why the parable immediately follows 24:36-51, where the Lord preached on the imminence of his arrival. He is reiterating that no man can guess the timing of his return, so all of creation should be on guard. The magnitude of the parable is consummated in 25:13, when Jesus teaches, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the

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<sup>5</sup> R. T. France explains what this looked like in the original context: "We do not know whether the torches had been lighted when the girls first set out, but, if so, they would not have stayed burning while they slept." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 949.

<sup>6</sup> This language is symbolic, and Jesus is pointing to the final judgment. Such language ties closely to Matt 7:21-23, when Jesus teaches the dangers of being a false convert. Addressing those who claim to believe but have never truly placed their faith in him alone, he warns that on judgment day they will hear, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt 7:23).

hour.”

The teaching is clear: Jesus will return when the world is lulled to sleep, so be ready. Or, stated in another way, his arrival is imminent. Because this is the case, the watching world must stay awake. Those who are ready for the bridegroom will be rewarded, and whoever is found unprepared will be blocked from entering the divine feast.

Verses 1-13 form the first half of the bridge between the imminence of Christ’s return and the judgment at Christ’s return, cementing the imminence of Christ’s return and touching on the judgment that follows. Verses 14-30 complete the second portion of the bridge by touching on Jesus’s imminent arrival but detailing the reckoning that will take place when he returns. This second parable emphasizes the different levels of reward and punishment dispersed on judgment day.

Verse 14 begins the second of two parables in Matthew 25, focusing on stewardship. Jesus tells the story of a man who takes a trip, but before he does, he gathers his servants and grants each a portion of his estate to oversee. Verse 15 explains that in his distribution, the master of the property grants differing talents to those under his roof “according to his ability.” One servant gets five talents, one laborer gets two, and the final individual gets one talent.

With responsibilities levied to multiple individuals, the owner begins his journey. Upon his departure, the servants took what was entrusted to them and went about their business. Verses 16-18 reveal that the approaches taken differ. Those who received five and two talents put the money to work and doubled what had been given to them. But the third, who had received one talent, “went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money” (Matt 25:18). The first two servants had taken the master’s wealth and developed more, while the third overseer took what was entrusted to him and let it sit.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur explains that it was common to bury valuables in the ground, but that was not the servant’s calling from his master. The task of the servant regarding the talent was not “to protect it,

Jesus continues the parable by describing that, after some time, the owner of the estate returned from his journey (without any warning that he was back in town). When he came home, he met with those who oversaw his property. This meeting was a judgment. It was a day of assessment. Standing before the master, the servants gave an account of how they handled what was his. Each person was to give a testimony as to how they shepherded what was given to them. The first two servants were applauded and received even more blessing. Matthew 25:21 and 25:23 describe the master's identical response to the servant who had doubled the five talents and the one who had invested the two talents. For both, the owner celebrated, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." Their faithfulness was rewarded.

The third servant then gave his report. Standing before the master, the servant who had buried the one talent stated that he had been scared. Out of fear, worried about losing what had been given to him, this servant buried the master's talent. Then, he gave the one talent back to the owner (Matt 25:24-25). Unfortunately for the third servant, this was unacceptable to the master. In a fury, the lord of the land rebuked him. Calling the man "wicked and slothful" (Matt 25:26), the master commanded that the one talent be taken and given to the servant who was faithful over the five talents. Because of his laxity in fulfilling his duty, the lazy servant faced horrendous consequences. In verse 30, the master declares that the wayward servant will be thrown "into the outer darkness . . . where there will weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The heavy tone of this parable is especially felt in verse 29. Alluding to the final judgment, with an emphasis on stewardship, Jesus teaches, "To everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Christ is explaining that judgment is coming, and all men will

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but to use it wisely for his master's profit" (102). John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 102.

be put on the stand. Eternity will be shaped by choices made on earth. The consequences are serious.

The closing words of the parable regard both the Christian's exponential reward for faithfulness and the damnable horrors of spurning God's commands. Those who have been faithful will be rewarded. However, those who are found in their sin, even the common grace they had will be condemnation against them.<sup>8</sup> God will be both Savior and Judge, and in all things, his righteousness will be put on display.<sup>9</sup> This second parable completes the connection between the Lord's teaching on his imminence (24:36-51) with his judgment (25:31-46). From this point Matthew 25:31-46 can be expounded to reveal the judgment that will take place at the return of Jesus Christ.

### **Exegesis**

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus begins with the majesty of the second coming. Verse 31 gives the description of Christ's arrival, with the Lord mentioning that he will descend in "glory." The language personifies the public nature of his advent. His arrival as the Son of Man will be one of such power that the world will take notice. He will be accompanied by an army of the angelic host, and together they are on a holy mission. His strength and divine rule will be on display.

The end of verse 31 describes the Lord sitting on his throne. The picture of the King on his throne is a direct reference to authority and judgment.<sup>10</sup> Such a vision would be

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson confirms these eternal consequences when he writes, "As there are degrees of felicity and responsibility in the consummated kingdom (e.g., 25:14-30; cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15), so also are there degrees of punishment (e.g., Matt 11:22, Luke 12:47-48)." D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 587.

<sup>9</sup> Commenting on this verse, J. C. Ryle notes the weight of the passage. He also explains that there will be "no excuse" for anyone at the day of judgment. "The Judge of all the earth will be found to have done right; the ruin of the lost soul will be found to be his own fault." J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 272.

<sup>10</sup> Carson picks up these themes when he writes, "He sits on his throne, not only as Judge, but as king (see v. 34); for all of divine authority is mediated through him (28:18; cf. 1 Cor 15:25; Heb 12:2)." Carson, *Matthew*, 58.

clearly perceived by his listeners and fits with Matthew's intention to reach the Jewish people. References to the Son of Man and the glorious arrival of the Messiah with his holy warriors would also have directly impacted the audience.<sup>11</sup>

Verses 32-33 describe the scene at the Lord's throne, where the world is gathered before him. Jew and Gentile, those from every tongue and tribe, will stand before his majesty. No soul will escape his gaze. From his seat of power, with everyone who has ever drawn breath before him, Jesus makes a division. Using the illustration of sheep and goats, he shows the separation that will take place on the final day. There is no grey area, one is either in Christ or a child of the Devil. He already referenced the polarizing nature of one's standing before him in Matthew 12:30 when he proclaimed, "Whoever is not with me is against me." The Lord is now making clear that when he returns, there will be judgment, and two lanes will be created: the redeemed and the lost.

Verse 34 confirms what the listeners and readers would have assumed.<sup>12</sup> Those on the right, the sheep, are invited to enter their eternal rest. Christ expresses the beauty of the eternal state by noting that the bliss awaiting his chosen ones had been prepared for them "from the foundation of the world." The triune God had meticulously been planning the eternal abode for his elect, and when Christ returns, they will receive their inheritance. But the Lord explains how this division will be delineated, and the eternal judgment is based on one's spiritual fruit. It must be stated clearly that Jesus, the Bible in its entirety, and historic Christianity adamantly affirm that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for God's glory alone. However, in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus is not primarily addressing justification. Using an illustration, he is painting a picture of

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<sup>11</sup> Hendriksen details the usage of the title "Son of Man" throughout Jesus's ministry, explaining that he distilled the fullness of his Messiahship over time. He explains that Matthew was focused on this term as well, knowing its impact on a Jewish audience. Daniel 7, one passage that describes the Son of Man and his authority, would have been in the minds of the listeners as Jesus spoke. William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 403-7.

<sup>12</sup> R. C. Sproul notes that to be placed on the right side was considered a place of honor and the left was a place of dishonor in the Jewish culture of the day. R. C. Sproul, *Matthew*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 734.

judgment day, and what will take place. On that day, there will be a public assessment.

In verses 35-36, Jesus claims that the sheep were those who fed him, gave him clothes, welcomed him, and visited him in while under arrest. These examples are not the means by which one is regenerated, but they are fruit of one who has been born again. Jesus is teaching that if one has placed their faith in him alone, then their lives would reflect godliness.<sup>13</sup> Those whose home had been prepared before the world began had been given spiritual life by the sovereign work of God, and their lives reflected his salvation.

Verses 37-40 clarify this interpretation, because, when told of their good deeds, the sheep are confused. They do not remember doing such things and are dumbfounded. After asking when they committed those acts for Christ (the Judge), he replies, “As you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt 25:40). The Lord is clarifying that when Christ-followers serve those in need out of love for him, especially those in the church, they are serving Jesus. Because of his work in them, their lives give testimony to their spiritual transformation. Therefore, they are allowed entrance into the bliss of eternity.

The horror of the passage arrives in verse 41. For the goats, those placed on the left, are told, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” There is no way to skirt the gravity of Christ’s words. He is pointing to eternal damnation, the flames of the lake of fire, an everlasting abyss of torment. Those who are not sheep will be immediately cast aside for destruction. But how is one placed with the goats? How does the Lord say he will make his choice for those on the left? As with the sheep, the judgment will reveal each person’s standing. Verses 42-43 describe the Lord’s assessment of the unconverted.

Contrasted with the assistance given by the sheep when Jesus was hungry, thirsty, and looking for a safe place to stay, the goats are described as those who did not

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<sup>13</sup> Further proof is provided in v. 37, when those on the right, the sheep, are called “the righteous.”

offer help in the time of need. While the sheep ran to the rescue, the goats refused to visit the Lord when he was under duress. However, like the sheep, the goats are puzzled. In Matthew 25:44, they ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” The Son of Man’s response is opposite of his answer to the beloved. He says, “As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (Matt 25:45).

Once again, Jesus is not saying that the goats were condemned because they did not do enough for his standards. He is not preaching a works-righteousness system of religion. He is speaking to the contrary. He is noting that their failure to act on his behalf was proof that they had never experienced living faith. Their choices to ignore cries for help and self-centered tendencies were evidence of the hardness of their hearts. Because they did not love their neighbor in a time of need, they were reflecting a soul that was still dead in sin.<sup>14</sup>

Matthew 25:46 is the closing verse of this passage and the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse. In just a few words, Jesus solidifies why the second coming is important, why the imminence of his arrival needs to be understood, and how the ramifications of his judgment impact every creature. Matthew writes, “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

It is essential to understand the immediate execution of the penalty, as well as the prompt welcoming of saints into their final abode. Upon the final judgment, the sentences dispersed are immediately applied. For Christ-followers, there is no delay in their reward—they are immediately welcomed by their Father. Their faith is realized, they received their position in his household, and have a plan for the remainder of the ages. They do not have to wait any longer to experience union with their Lord.

For the unregenerate, there is a trial, a verdict, and sentencing. When the King

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<sup>14</sup> Contrasting the actions of the sheep and the goats, France explains that the action taken by the servant-minded sheep “marks true discipleship.” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 966.

reads the justice that will be applied, the wicked are swiftly carried away to torment. There is no time for adjustment, there is no opportunity to fix mishaps, and excuses are not allowed. The prison doors slam behind the carnal, and they will be sealed for all time.

Such a summation to the message on the Mount of Olives is horrifying, but fitting. After warning about the end of the age and describing what will take place when he returns, Jesus concludes with the ultimate reason for his sermon: the eternal consequences of the final judgment. The key to understanding the Lord's motivation in chapters 24 and 25 rest in feeling the heaviness of 25:46. The weight of the verse rests on noticing both the "punishment" and the "life" are eternal.

The task for the exegete is to determine what Jesus means by "eternal punishment." There is a great deal of debate between theologians on this matter, and even godly men disagree concerning never-ceasing torment for the wicked versus annihilationism.<sup>15</sup> The position of this thesis is that Jesus's teaching in Matthew 25 (and the rest of the Bible) is that hell is everlasting, conscience torment for the unconverted. This is not a matter to take lightly, and therefore the following section will develop the argument more fully.<sup>16</sup>

**Matthew 25 teaches the eternity of hell.** In verse 46, Jesus uses the same word, *aionion*, to describe the eternal wrath and eternal life that each group receives.<sup>17</sup> This is important because as the Lord is describing the salvation of the believer, he is also describing the pain that awaits the unregenerate. However long he planned for believers

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<sup>15</sup> For example, John Stott was one theologian who taught annihilationism.

<sup>16</sup> The scope of this thesis is unable to expose this argument in its fullness, but this chapter endeavors to make a brief, cogent defense for an eternal hell from Matt 25.

<sup>17</sup> Citing Matt 25:46 specifically, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* notes, "[Pertaining] to a period of unending duration, *without end*." Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, rev. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 33. Referring to Matt 25:41, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* reads, "Has the full sense of divine eternity." Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:209.

to have eternal life, he intended the same duration for the wicked to have eternal punishment. This is a vital aspect of not only the passage, but on the doctrine of hell.

If one attempts to wipe away Jesus's teaching of eternal punishment from Matthew 25:46, then one will also have to change Jesus's intention regarding the everlasting bliss of the Christ-follower. This is the consequence of denying the eternal meaning of Jesus in verse 46. Any attempt to retain the eternal blessings of salvation while ignoring the eternal horrors of hell reveals an inconsistency that is typical of erroneous theology and spurious exegesis. While this is not an attempt to minimize the complexity of the subject matter, the testimony of God's Word is that in following the final judgment there is a sentence given: righteous or unrighteous. Upon this declaration, each placement will be unending.

To be fair to opposing views, the attempt to minimize the duration of hell may arise from a desire to soften the perceived injustice of God. Or, such an aversion to an eternal hell could come from a tender heart that does not delight in the pain of others. However, such a conclusion reveals a misunderstanding of the purity and holiness of God and forgets that the Lord owes nothing to humanity.

Hell is eternal because sin against God is so heinous.<sup>18</sup> In any court of law, the punishment for a crime is correlated to the travesty of the action. The uglier the offense, the more severe the pain inflicted. The duration of the sentence is assigned based on the degree of the injustice.

Sinning against the thrice holy God is worthy of eternal damnation. The consequences for treason against the Lord are, and only can be, everlasting torment. Sin attempts to steal God's throne and is an effort to rob him of glory. The creature shakes a fist in the face of its Maker, saying "no, I don't want your rule!" For man, who was formed from the dust, to defy the Creator who gives him breath is utter debauchery.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Helm writes, "Hell is without limit because the offence justly punished is committed against one of infinite, immeasurable holiness and goodness." Paul Helm, *The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 116.

Another facet of hell that is rarely mentioned is that upon entering hell, the sinner is still in their sin. Stated differently, they do not cease sinning. So, even from the pits of hell, the rebel will still hate God and seethe at him. In a sense, the longer they are damned, the worse they will be. This refutes the idea of a short-term sentence in the lake of fire. With utter brokenness and motivation to reach the lost, all preachers should affirm the eternity of torment for those outside of the faith.

However, Scripture does teach that there will be a “difference of degree” in hell.<sup>19</sup> Many factors are considered for one’s varying punishment, but God’s justice is magnified by this biblical doctrine. He will not punish the sluggard in the same way that he judges the mass-murderer. Based on the life one lived, their pain will be applied accordingly. Or, the amount of light an individual rejected will directly impact the weight of their punishment. For those who have never heard the gospel, their judgment will be less severe than those who have been well-aware of the fullness of Christ’s news, still rejecting God’s grace.<sup>20</sup>

While the teaching of hell should drive Christians to weep, pray, and give their lives to share the gospel, the gravity of its existence should not be ignored. Jesus includes such teaching in Matthew 25:31-46 intentionally. The Savior is proclaiming the eternity of the judgment that is coming. He is striving to make the world ready.

Jesus clarifies that while the Christian will experience the bliss of everlasting rest, those outside of the family of God will face conscious, continual torment for all of time. This is earth-shattering news and needs to be shared. It needs to be announced. It needs to be preached. Doctrines such as hell, as hard as they may be for some to hear, impact the pulpit. The eternity of hell is a subject that directly affects preaching.

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<sup>19</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 5:304.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Peterson describes the gradation of everlasting torment: “Scripture teaches that although hell is everlasting for all its inhabitants, some suffer worse than others.” Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 198.

## **Conclusion**

Through study of the context and exegesis of Matthew 25:31-46, it has been argued that when Christ returns, he will bring judgment. The New Testament teaches that there is one public event where all of humanity is gauged by the piercing eyes of Jesus. When he declares the final verdict, the sentence is delivered without delay. The lost will be damned, and the Christ-follower will enter their eternal reward.

The eternity of hell has also been detailed, showing that the punishment for the wicked will know no end. When cast into the abyss, the days of pain will be unceasing for the carnal man or woman. For all eternity, the wicked will be thrashed for their iniquity.

The correlation to preaching is unmistakable. After being made aware of these realities, those who preach must be resolved to herald the oracles of God. When the preacher rises to speak, the reality of Christ's imminent judgment and the pain that the lost will feel should be fresh on his mind. Souls hang in the balance. Eternities depend on the Word being proclaimed.

As he ascends to the lectern, the eternal horrors of hell should be right before the preacher's eyes. Because, when he understands the damnation waiting for those who die in their sins, the preacher cannot help but preach with an anointed unction. Preaching with urgency and pleading with souls arises from an understanding of the imminence of Christ's return, and that with his imminent arrival, he will bring judgment. This judgment, for the unconverted, will be beyond devastating. Therefore, preach the Word with urgency.

### **John 5:25-29**

John 5:25-29 is another portion of Scripture that details the judgment that takes place at Christ's return. While confirming the information analyzed in Matthew 25:31-46, this section will focus specifically on the timing of the judgment. Through an understanding of the Gospel according to John, the context of chapter 5, and exegesis, it will be shown that the final judgment is attached to the second coming.

There is no second chance or warning between the second coming and humanity's trial.<sup>21</sup> The moment of the parousia will be the hour of assessment. By showing the connection of the second coming to judgment day, it is evident that not only is Jesus arriving at any moment, but judgment is also imminent. Because of the imminence of the final reckoning, preachers must think on that day with regularity. When ministers of the gospel grasp the everlasting consequences of the final judgment, they will be propelled to proclaim the Word in earnest.

### **Context**

The Gospel according to John was written by the apostle John, the disciple who walked so closely with Jesus that he laid his head on Jesus's chest. Throughout the book, John refers to himself as "the one whom Jesus loved."<sup>22</sup> John covers many aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, with a specific emphasis on the true divinity of the God-Man.<sup>23</sup>

John makes the purpose of his writing clear. A mass of information could be included regarding who Jesus is, how he lived, and what this means for mankind. But the

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<sup>21</sup> The lack of time between the second coming and judgment refutes the Dispensationalist understanding of Christ's return (as well as the historic premillennial position). If one holds to a "secret Rapture," such an event would be a tangible moment of awakening for the world. It would be an incredible evangelism tool. The unconverted would be well-aware that Christianity was true, and they would have time to come to faith and to warn others. While the desire for the masses to be saved and for the lost to be warned honors the Lord and all Christians should have such a passion, a silent removal of saints to heaven does not fit with the New Testament's teaching on the second coming. If the "Rapture" (as defined by Dispensationalism) were true, then the imminence of the second coming would be lost, and so with it the magnitude of judgment. A Dispensationalist may preach with urgency because of death, but their theology does not promote earnest preaching due to imminent judgment. The purpose of this chapter is to show that the world's warning and the time to flee to the saving arms of Jesus Christ is today, because judgment is coming, and it may be today. Therefore, preachers must preach the Word with urgency.

<sup>22</sup> John refers to himself in this way multiple times throughout his writing, but John 13:23 is a specific passage where he is lying beside the Lord and considers himself to have a special relationship with Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 39-40. Michaels explains John's emphasis on the divinity of Christ and notes that Jesus proclaims to be God in the Gospel of John by "*showing* them the face of God in his own face (see 12:45; 14:9) and his own life" (40).

apostle clarifies that he has a specific purpose for every detail he includes in the Gospel that bears his name. He does not share each lesson, every story, and did not list tertiary matters regarding the Messiah. In 20:31, he writes concerning his purpose and his retelling of the life and ministry of Christ: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Addressing a mixed audience (both Jew and Gentile), John wrote so that they might know the fullness of the gospel.<sup>24</sup> Each verse in the book was included so that, by hearing the good news of Jesus Christ, the reader would trust in him and be saved. He longed to see people inherit eternal life, and he realized this was only possible through faith in the Son of God. Therefore, he wrote as an evangelist, articulating the majesty of Christ and the glory of his message. John’s missionary motivation is essential to understanding the book of John. Each chapter, verse, and story must be tied to 20:30-31 to grasp its richness.<sup>25</sup>

John opens the Gospel with a lofty explanation of the divine nature of Christ. John 1:1-5 is a doxological explanation of the eternality of God the Son and his glory.<sup>26</sup> In verses 4-5 and 9-18, John explains that God stepped out of heaven to shine light upon the dark world. He came, in the fullness of deity, to redeem his own. Fitting with the evangelistic narrative, John writes, “To all who did receive him, he gave the right to

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<sup>24</sup> William Hendriksen explains that it was a Gentile and Jewish audience. While there were Jewish traditions noted, they were explained by John. This would have helped a Gentile reader comprehend the fullness of the message. William Hendriksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 35.

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur rightly connects the totality of John to this verse, including the divinity of Christ: “John’s apologetic purpose, which is inseparable from his evangelistic purpose, was to convince his readers of Jesus’s true identity. He presents him as God incarnate (1:1, 14; 8:23, 58; 10:30; 20:28), the Messiah (1:41; 4:25-26), and the Savior of the world (4:42).” John MacArthur, *John 1:11, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 9.

<sup>26</sup> R. Kent Hughes writes, “The simple sentence of verse 1 is the most compact and pulsating theological statement in all of Scripture. Jesus was always existing from all eternity as God, in perfect fellowship with God the Father and (though not mentioned) the Holy Spirit. He is the cosmic Christ.” R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word New Testament Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 17.

become children of God” (John 1:12).

Chapter 1 also introduces John the Baptist, the “man sent from God” to prepare the path for the Messiah (John 1:6). He came to preach the good news and make things ready for the Master. He was a herald, a “voice . . . crying out in the wilderness” (John 1:23). This prophet came to till the ground before the Savior arrived. Upon seeing Christ in 1:29, John the Baptist confirms that Jesus is the one he had been proclaiming all along.

The opening chapter closes with Jesus calling his first disciples, and in chapter 2, the Lord performs his first miracle, turning water to wine at a wedding (John 2:1-12). John then describes Jesus’s righteous indignation over the wickedness taking place within the Temple in 2:13-22. God even used this display of holy anger to draw men and women to himself. On the heels of Jesus’s activity at the Temple, John writes, “Many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing” (John 2:23).

John 3 is one of the best-known chapters in all of Scripture, and in this passage, John articulates what it means for a sinner to experience new life in Christ. Answering the ponderings of one of the Jewish elites, Jesus tells Nicodemus that “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). From Nicodemus’s questions and his lack of comprehension, Jesus continues to proclaim the most glorious news of all the cosmos. How can man be born again? The answer is found in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” When a man is born again, he believes the good news of the gospel and he is a partaker of life everlasting.

John 4 continues the gospel proclamation, as Jesus interacts with the Samaritan woman at the well (vv. 1-44). Through his conversation with this woman, John records that “many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39). John is faithful to his purpose, preaching the gospel and showing how the ministry of the God-Man saves the lost.

Jesus heals the son of a Roman official (John 4:46-54) as well as a paralytic

(John 5:1-17) and uses these miraculous healings to publicly announce his equality with Yahweh. John notes the problems this caused. He explained that the Jews were plotting to kill him because he was “making himself equal with God” (5:18). Jesus elaborates, and claims that he and the Father work together; they labor as one. As the opposition seethes, Jesus presses ahead. In John 4:21, he claims that he “gives life” and has been entrusted to judge the world.

This judgment is one of eternal destiny—who would be forgiven and who would be damned. For the original audience, they would have known that to judge in such a fashion was the sole right of the LORD. This equality with God the Father plays an integral role into the overarching message of the Gospel, but especially in 5:25-29. It is from his position as the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, that he delivers the news of the judgment. This divine evaluation will occur at his return.

### **Exegesis**

In John 5:25-29, amid fierce opposition, Jesus continues the explanation of his divinity and his authority to give life and judge. Jesus’s words in this short passage can be divided into two major segments: the hour of conversion (vv. 25-26) and the hour of judgment (vv. 28-29). The hinge of the passage is centered on the one who orchestrates both—the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 27).<sup>27</sup>

**The hour of conversion in 5:25-26.** Throughout the book of John, Jesus describes his divine nature and demonstrates his omnipotence in order that the lost may receive salvation. A major facet of his miracles and his healings in the first five chapters of the gospel were to prove that he is truly God, so that the audience may have spiritual life.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> MacArthur also sees this connection: “As with the authority to give life, the Father also gave the . . . Son the authority to execute judgment.” MacArthur, *John 1:11*, 198.

<sup>28</sup> This approach fits with the apostle’s expressed purpose in 20:30-31, which is the conversion of souls.

Jesus is aware of the difficulty that his claims of divinity may be for the original audience. So, in John 5:23, he clarifies that a true follower of Yahweh honors the one who is equal with Yahweh. Jesus explains that to obey him is to obey the God of Moses. In fact, the way to spot an authentic child of the LORD is to analyze how one responds to Jesus's words; because all life comes from God and Jesus "gives life to whom he will" (John 5:21). While the spiritually dead do not reply kindly to Jesus, those invigorated with Christ's life will agree with his words.

Jesus is teaching that those who hear his truth and follow him are genuine believers in God. Why would anyone follow him? Because they have been given life from God the Son. Jesus is the Giver of life, laboring in unison with the Father and the Spirit; therefore, those who love Jesus have been first loved by him and are recipients of his spiritual life. This is the essence of 5:25-26.

Jesus is also describing the immediate grace of regeneration.<sup>29</sup> Soul-saving rescue is not only for the days ahead, but salvation from God is instant. Once he saves, the sinner is washed, cleansed, and wrapped in the arms of a heavenly Father. Salvation has come this very moment, and redemption is found in Jesus Christ alone. Those who embrace Christ today are those who have been redeemed by the grace of God and have been awakened to new life by the hand of the Almighty. Their eternity begins now.

**The hour of judgment in 5:28-29.** Verses 28-29 do not speak of spiritual renewal. They are focused on the everlasting consequences for those who are either found in Christ, those alive because of Jesus granting them life (v. 25), or those outside the family of God. Verses 25-26 list the new life in Christ that is realized the moment of regeneration, and verses 28-29 note the eternality of that division.

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<sup>29</sup> Herman Ridderbos confirms this perspective when he explains, "Those who hear this voice will not just live in the future, therefore, but now already they will 'pass out of death into life,' delivered from the power of death by the voice that calls them to rise (cf. 1 Jn. 3:14)." Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 198.

Verse 28 magnifies this distinction. In verse 25, Jesus explains that the time of salvation “is now here.” But in verse 28, pointing to the day of judgment, the Lord explains that it “is coming.” He is looking to the future. Jesus has already revealed the immediate promise of new life for his followers, and now he moves to describe the eternal judgment that awaits.

Verse 29 confirms Matthew 25 by describing the separation between the lost and the redeemed.<sup>30</sup> On that final day, there will be a division between those in Christ and those who are lost, and there will be two distinguished fates. These results are decided based on a judgment. And the judge is King Jesus.

**Jesus oversees both conversion and everlasting judgment.** Verse 27 joins regeneration with ultimate destiny, explaining that both are mediated by Christ. Jesus, as truly God and truly man, is the one who gives spiritual life and executes judgment. John records that Jesus proclaims himself to be the Son of Man, a reference to Daniel 7.<sup>31</sup> This language would have been tangible evidence of the Lord’s intention to describe himself as the consummate Judge over all the world, specifically in an eschatological fashion.<sup>32</sup> The one who breathes life into dead men is the one who reigns. This King who reigns is the one who will return from heaven and judge the nations.

### **The Timing of the Final Judgment**

In John 5:25-29, Jesus’s divine rule and authority is put on display. The Messiah explains that he grants spiritual life, and he will also be the judge over one’s eternal placement. While spiritual life begins today, the ultimate judgment over the souls of

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<sup>30</sup> Matt 25 was studied in detail earlier in this thesis. At the second coming, Jesus will bring judgment. There will be a division between the lost and the redeemed, and following this judgment, each person will be assigned their eternity.

<sup>31</sup> Hughes connects Jesus’s words to Dan 7 and the “Son of Man.” Hughes, *John*, 171.

<sup>32</sup> Ridderbos articulates the fullness of Jesus’s intention in his usage of the phrase “Son of Man,” including his authority in the present and the future. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 200-201.

mankind will occur later. This section will be shown that John 5:25-29 reveals that the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment will take place at the second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup>

The key to understanding the timing of judgment day is discerning 5:28-29. The specific task for the exegete is to determine what Jesus intends regarding the “hour . . . when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out.” Jesus is addressing those who have physically died, and their bodies have been buried. However, Christ announces that that will not be the last of the story and explains that there will be a day when they are awakened and summoned for judgment.

When connected to the rest of biblical theology, the “hour” that the dead will “hear his voice” is the second coming.<sup>34</sup> This is endorsed by at least two New Testament passages. First Thessalonians 4:16 explains that the parousia will be accompanied with “a cry of command, the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” First Corinthians 15:51-52, in one of the most glorious passages about the gospel and the resurrection, Paul writes, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

Both passages connect the resurrection of the dead with the public nature of the second coming. Paul lists that there will be the blast of a trumpet, a beckoning cry, and the shout of an angel. At this visible, glorious return of King Jesus, mankind is instantaneously transformed to stand and be assessed. When Jesus descends from the

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<sup>33</sup> As Zaspel documents the beliefs of Warfield, he touches on eschatology. He notes that when it came to the second coming of Christ, Warfield “emphasizes repeatedly that it will be an event marked primarily by universal judgment and resurrection . . . both the eternal destruction of the wicked and the glory of the saints will be realized when Christ returns.” Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 534.

<sup>34</sup> Hendriksen understands Jesus to be referring to the second coming, and he clarifies that Jesus intends his future advent to be a public spectacle. When commenting on John 5:28, Hendriksen writes, “Instead of being in any sense secret or silent, the second coming is going to be public and audible (as well as visible).” Hendriksen, *John*, 203.

clouds, the dead will be raised, and every eye will be beholding the King of glory.

What is especially relevant to this study is Scripture's description that the dead will rise at the moment of Christ's advent. In both passages, the resurrection of the dead is united to the public arrival of the God-Man. At the parousia, Jesus will step off his throne, storm out of heaven on a white steed (Rev 19:11), and there will be a wake-up call for the nations to take notice.

At the end of the age, when he returns to save and to conquer, the dead will hear the roar of the King. The grandeur of his arrival will be so magnificent that even the tombs will open.<sup>35</sup> With the mass of creation watching, the dead will rise, and each soul will stand and give an account before the Judge.<sup>36</sup> Every man and woman's life will be analyzed, and the Lord will decide each one's fate. The sentencing will be swift and final. These truths should transform the pulpit.<sup>37</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Through an analysis of John 5:25-29, this section has shown that there is judgment as Jesus descends from heaven. When the New Testament speaks of the second coming, it is referring to the glorious arrival of King Jesus. There is no second opportunity for salvation or any warning between the time of Christ's return and the hour of man's final judgment. The next scene in redemptive history is the public advent of Christ, which is inseparable from judgment day. The clouds will open, the trumpet will shout, and the

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<sup>35</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4:691-702. Bavinck concurs with the position of this thesis. He offers a lengthy study on the timing of the final judgment and what will take place and connects the second coming of Christ with the final judgment: "The day of our Lord's return brings about the resurrection of believers, the judgment of unbelievers, and the renewal of creation" (4:691).

<sup>36</sup> Vos explains the simplicity of this timing. He writes that the resurrection of the dead will take place "before the last judgment, at the return of Christ." Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:270.

<sup>37</sup> Commenting on the gravity of Jesus's words in John 5:28-29, Mark Johnston writes, "As he speaks of a day when he will judge, he also emphasizes the future destiny of those who will be judged . . . these words are intended to make us tremble." Mark Johnston, *John, Let's Study Series* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), 82-83.

Master will descend to rescue his beloved and destroy his enemies. The bodies of the dead will be resurrected, and the world will stand and be counted.

The gravity of John 5:25-29 directly impacts the preacher's approach to handling the Word and the emotion he carries into the pulpit. When the imminence of Christ's justice is exposed, the burden to herald God's truth is magnified. Since today could be judgment day, preachers must see all their labor as working toward that end and must preach in earnest. Tomorrow may be the eternal state, so those who preach must do so with their sights on the age to come.

### **The Christian's Judgment at Christ's Return**

With the imminence of Christ's return shown and the timing of the day of judgment clarified, this section will focus on the assessment Christians have before the Almighty. As was shown previously in this chapter, the final judgment is for both the Christian and the pagan. The lost are damned and have gradations of eternal punishment based on their iniquity. The Christ-follower will receive the fullness of their salvation, but they have a judgment centered on eternal reward. As there are differing degrees of punishment in hell, there are also varying rewards in the new heavens and the new earth.

To illustrate the New Testament's teaching on the assessment given to believers, two passages will be used. Both are from Paul's interaction with the church at Corinth: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-15. Second Corinthians reveals that every individual will stand before God. First Corinthians 3:5-15 confirms the message in 2 Corinthians 5, but this passage specifically shows the details of the final judgment for Christ-followers.

There are three purposes to this portion of the thesis. First, it is imperative that all Christians understand they will give an account as to the stewardship of their lives, and their eternal responsibilities will be tied to their faithfulness while on earth. Second, preachers must grasp that the entirety of their ministries will be evaluated by the Lord. Third, the application to preaching is developed. Preachers must not only inform their

congregations of this imminent day of assessment, but they should implore their followers to holy living. As they press those under their care to live for Christ's renown, they must faithfully administer their duties. Consequently, the summons to preach with urgency because of such eternal ramifications is overwhelming.

### **Second Corinthians 5:1-10**

Second Corinthians 5:1-10 reveals that all persons will stand before God. This reality is essential for preachers because it directly impacts how they serve and how they preach to their listeners. The text in 2 Corinthians articulates the truth that all of humanity will stand and give an account, and it shows how judgment day impacted Paul's ministry. The consequences of Paul's words will be tied to modern-day preaching, along with the need for preachers to gaze upon that final day and preach urgently in the light of Christ's second coming.

**The context of 2 Corinthians.** Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is written to a group of believers who are dear to Paul's heart, but who have had multiple problems in their congregation. Scholars consider 2 Corinthians to be the fourth letter written by Paul to this body of believers.<sup>38</sup> In this letter, Paul writes after a recent visit to Corinth, where he faced significant opposition.<sup>39</sup>

Those opposed to Paul were questioning his authority as apostle and challenging his calling to lead them in the Scriptures. Second Corinthians is Paul's defense of his responsibility to shepherd God's people—a calling given by the Lord Jesus Christ. The audience of the letter would have been a conglomerate of those who were opposed to him

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 9-15.

<sup>39</sup> Murry Harris thoroughly addresses Paul's issue with fierce opponents in Corinth. Murry J. Harris, *2 Corinthians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 431-34.

along with supporters of his ministry.<sup>40</sup> Paul writes to the believers in Corinth to edify those who were defending his apostleship, to warn and correct those who continued to combat his role, and to provide the entire group with a vision of eternity, so that they would come together and live for the glory of God in all things.

Chapters 1-3 consist of Paul's rebuttal of his opponents, and he eloquently defends his calling and his work for Christ. In chapter 4, Paul explains that since he has been set-apart by Christ for this task and knows that the Lord's favor is on his ministry, he presses on. Even through the most painful situations, including the heartbreak he was suffering by those he loved in Corinth, Paul looked to his future reward. He proclaims that his confidence is "knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Cor 4:14). During intense pain and amid severe ministry trials, Paul was looking to the final day, the return of Jesus Christ. This vision is the background of his words in 2 Corinthians 5.

**Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.** The focus of this passage is verse 10. Paul's statements culminate in the final assessment that he knows he (and all mankind) will give before the Lord.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of what takes place in his life and ministry, Paul is steadfast as he looks to that moment.

Verse 1 magnifies the glory of the eternal bliss that awaits Christ-followers. Paul spent the first four chapters of the book detailing his labor for God and his calling from the Savior. However, he was not including any of that information to boast. His boast is in

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<sup>40</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 25-26. Kistemaker details the mixed nature of the audience, those who sided with Paul and those who questioned him. Kistemaker notes that Paul both "commends the readers . . . he seeks to strengthen those members who are faithful to God, the Scriptures, and apostolic teaching. But he also has words of rebuke and refutation for those who side with his opponents." Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Paul's emphasis on the final judgment is confirmed by 5:11, when Paul teaches, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others." Because of the second coming and the assessment of the masses, Paul labors faithfully and preaches to those who are unaware. He is warning all people, Christians and non-Christians alike.

Christ. His chief end is to make much of Jesus and spend himself until the conclusion of his days so that he can sprint into his final abode.

Verses 2-5 reiterate the opening chapters' message. There are difficult times in life and ministry. Paul was in the midst of a trial. His body ached, and he was groaning for relief. His heart longed for eternity. He was exhausted from facing the Devil and the torment of life, but he knew that this life was not the end. More was coming for those in Christ.

Verses 6-8 continue this principle. His boldness originates from his God, and his hope is based on Jesus Christ. Paul is trusting in Christ alone, not merely to get through the difficult seasons, but also to carry him to glory. Even though he could not see his eternal home, Paul had faith in its reality and trusted his Master to lead him to that end. For Paul, eternity was constantly on his mind.<sup>42</sup>

He was so consumed with his Savior and the age to come that he noted he would rather be in heaven than be on the earth. He was chosen by Christ to serve. He had been set apart to be an apostle to the nations, and he had seen God move in power. He had raised the dead, healed the sick, and proclaimed the Lord's truth to the masses. Still, he would prefer to behold the Lord face to face.

Verse 9 cements the telos for Paul's life and ministry. No matter where he is, on earth or with his Lord, his life's "aim is [to] please God." That is the simplicity of Paul's life and ministry. He is enamored with Christ and wants to spend each second and every breath to honor his Master.

Paul knows who he was before Christ. In 1 Timothy 1:15, he explains that he was the chief of sinners. Paul had tasted the grace of God and was captivated by the beauty of the gospel. He was infatuated with the Savior and was resolved to live for him, no

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<sup>42</sup> Herman Ridderbos notes Paul's awareness on the second coming, and how the reality of Christ's return consumed him. It also was essential to his preaching. Ridderbos writes, "This expectation of the coming of the Lord and what accompanies it is one of the most central and powerful motifs of Paul's preaching." Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 487.

matter the cost. While this love propelled his obedience, verse 10 gives another important motivation.

Verse 10 reveals, “We all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” Paul is speaking about Christians. This is the day of judgment and it is for those who have received the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul is describing that his life matters because one day he will give an account of how he used the time with which he was entrusted.

Paul’s focus shows the concentration of a steward. He realized that the reckoning for all men was coming, and he wanted to make the most of that moment. He did not want to be ashamed before his Lord, so he refused to waste one minute of his life. Paul was devoted to chasing after righteousness and was living for an eternal legacy. He understood that the choices of life resound in eternity.

The apostle lists the consequences of the Lord’s judgment. There is a reason the Lord summons all creatures, and the second half of verse 10 explains that upon appearing before the judgment seat of Christ, there will be repercussions: “we must all appear . . . so that each one may receive what is due.” The assessment will be intentional. What is judged will be valued and then credited to or discounted from the individual.

All people, those who refused Christ and those who have been born again by the Spirit of God, will stand before the Judge of all the earth. The works of man will be exposed. He will analyze what took place in the days before his second coming. Based on the evaluation, retribution (both good and bad) will be levied. This is sobering news.

### **First Corinthians 3:5-15**

This portion of Scripture accords with Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5. These verses show that the apostle Paul not only states that Christians will give an account of their lives, but he also lists the specifics of the final judgment for believers. Paul thoroughly details how the works of God’s people will be assessed by their Lord, and what the consequences will be.

**The context of 1 Corinthians 3:5-15.** First Corinthians is Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, but the first inside the biblical corpus.<sup>43</sup> Writing to the same audience as 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses them as a pastor. He goes to great lengths in the letter to address multiple issues they are facing, but one major issue is their divisiveness and lack of unity. Paul writes so that they may know the gospel, magnify Christ, and then live in the light of the truths they understood.<sup>44</sup> The counsel Paul gives, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is transformative.

Paul exhorts the readers in much of the letter, but even as he disciplines the flock, he displays his deep love for them. He was passionate about the glory of God, their good, and the gospel fruit they produce. Paul wants to see them unified and devoted to living for the renown of Christ and out of appreciation for the gospel. Corinth was a pagan city, and Paul wanted the people of God in that context to make an eternal impact.<sup>45</sup>

Chapter 1 opens with Paul’s introduction and he lists his gratefulness for the saints in Corinth. Immediately after he states his appreciation for them, the apostle goes directly to challenging the beloved to purge the divisions among them. Verses 1-17 is a section where Paul urges them to unify on behalf of their Lord. In 1:12, he rebukes them for taking sides and aligning with specific preachers, and commands them to magnify Christ, not men.

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Schreiner details the complexities of Paul’s correspondence to the church in Corinth. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 8-11.

<sup>44</sup> Schreiner notes that the premise of 1 Corinthians is Jesus Christ and the gospel: “All the themes broached in the book have to be read against the horizon of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the grace of God...every area of dispute and every matter dividing believers must be recalibrated and rethought, and lived out in the light of the truth that Jesus Christ is the crucified and risen Lord.” Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Like many port cities filled with travelers from all over the world, Corinth was known for its debauchery. MacArthur writes, “Even to the pagan world the city was known for its moral corruption.” He also lists Paul’s multiple charges against the city from 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), viii.

In 1:18-30, Paul pronounces the glory of the gospel to remind the church in Corinth that the gospel supersedes any man or his ministry. He wants the flock to cling to the good news and to remember the primacy of Jesus Christ. He explains that God's grace is not based on social status but is grounded in the mercy of God. The message of Christ is folly to the world, but it is the saving grace for his followers. Divine favor is their sole hope. Therefore, the only boast any believer has is in God.<sup>46</sup>

Paul grounds the premise of all he does in the Lord Jesus Christ. He writes, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). This was the heartbeat of Paul's life and ministry. As he ministered to the Corinthians, he did not want them straying from the glory of Christ's sacrifice for sinners. When it came to prioritizing preachers, it was ridiculous to do so because the man who preaches is nothing. The godly preacher points to the Master, the one before whom all men must bow.

In 2:6-16, Paul explains that this gospel, the one he proclaims, is only understandable by the Holy Spirit. The "foolishness" of the gospel that he described in chapter 1 is explained further in chapter 2. The only way the Corinthians believed is through supernatural rebirth, which was granted by the Spirit of the living God.

Chapter 3 opens with another loving rebuke, where the apostle explains that the church's corrupted thinking is symptomatic of those who are "infants in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1). He notes that he longed to give them the deeper truths of God, but their waywardness had stunted their growth. They were unable to comprehend the lofty things of the Almighty.

With the heart of a shepherd, Paul warned the Corinthians about following men instead of Jesus because, as he was explaining, the best of men are men at best. There is a day coming when every man, great and small alike, will stand before the King, and their lives will be judged by fire. So, those who preach and those who listen must be on guard to live for that day of reckoning.

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<sup>46</sup> In 1 Cor 1:31, Paul paraphrases Jer 9, and writes, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

**Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 3:5-15.** In this passage, verses 5-6 clarify that all authentic spiritual fruit comes from God. He alone is the Sovereign, and he causes things to flourish. Even the gifts granted to preachers are provided by the grace of God, and he equips each as he sees fit, for his own purposes.<sup>47</sup> Individuals cannot demand God's favor on their ministry, nor can they complain that they have not received enough grace from the Lord. No preacher can look at another minister and grumble if their giftings differ.<sup>48</sup>

Paul is explaining that the men being touted as the supreme teachers are merely servants in the hand of the Almighty. There is no preaching without divine blessing. Verse 7 makes this even clearer, as the example of gardening is used. No matter who plants the crop or provides water, they labor in tandem. Only the Lord can make plants grow. All the labor in the world cannot force the flowers to bloom, and the same is true in ministry. Only the Maker of all things can multiply spiritual flourishing. No matter what role each person plays in the preaching of the gospel, God is the one to praise. Magnify Christ, serve him, and rely on him for the results.

Verse 8 of chapter 3 connects the ministry of those who preach to judgment day with larger application for the church. He hints at the truths he will expound further in verses 11-15. Maintaining the figurative language of the garden, Paul explains that if one is called to water, but another is called to plant, all that will matter is if they each did their job. They will not be called to answer for the other, but each will be accountable for his own duty. In fact, laborers are compensated in correlation to the quality of their work.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Later in the letter, Paul explains spiritual gifts, and teaches that “all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions each one individually as he wills” (1 Cor 12:11).

<sup>48</sup> Paul's words in Rom 9 are applicable here. In Rom 9:20, Paul writes, “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘why have you made me like this?’” God does as he pleases, and this includes equipping men and women for serving the church.

<sup>49</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge notes that the temporal example connects to the eternal intention of Paul: “[Paul] is setting up the discussion he will explore in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.” Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 284.

In verses 9-10, Paul restates the teamwork between himself, Apollos, and Cephas. They all labor as a brotherhood, and their work is shown in the life of the Corinthian church. No man brags about the church as if it is his doing, but they look to the Lord and praise him for his mercy in building his church.

However, since they each have a role to play, they all labor in earnest, precisely carrying out their duties. This is Paul's message in verse 10. While he knew his calling, he also knew others were laboring beside him. In Christian love, he worked for the glory of God and the benefit of his partners. He also knew that each facet of his ministry would be placed under the microscope, and the impeccable eyes of Christ would one day assess how well he carried out his responsibilities.

Verses 11-15 focus directly on judgment day and what that means for Christians. The immediate focus is on ministers of the gospel, but the application is for any who have been born again by the Spirit of God.<sup>50</sup> In these verses, Paul explains that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ: his person, his work, and his gospel.<sup>51</sup> Ministers are to preach his truth and congregants are to strive to be faithful to him. Salvation is by his grace and his grace alone. Following conversion, Christ-followers are to be committed to their Lord.

Verse 12 describes the choices men and women make in their lives, especially in service to Christ. Paul reveals two genres of activity: faithfulness and waywardness.

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<sup>50</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker explains that all of humanity will stand and give an account of their lives. Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 112. Some exegetes argue that this passage refers only to ministers. The position of this thesis is that this section addresses those who serve Christ vocationally, but also applies to those who serve him as laypeople. As Christians are those who are called to glorify God and fulfill the Great Commission, each individual is to steward their lives according. Therefore, the works presented here are applicable to all believers. Jas 3:1 supports this view. James teaches that teachers "will be judged with greater strictness." Since the Bible preacher will be analyzed more harshly, it follows that there is an assessment for those who do not teach, but with a different standard.

<sup>51</sup> John Calvin, commenting on 3:11, writes, "For as Christ is the foundation of the Church, because he is the only source of salvation and eternal life-because in him we come to know God the Father-because in him we have the source of every blessing." John Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 135-36.

The jewels and precious metals reflect what has been done in accordance with God's Word, for his glory, and with pure motives. Wood, hay, and straw represent the temporal decisions people make. As Christ-followers spend their time living for the eternal, they acquire such precious gems. When God's people act inappropriately or stray from his decrees, they accumulate the worthless items.<sup>52</sup>

Paul reveals the importance of these pieces in verse 13. He explains that the day (referring to judgment day, which is inseparable from the second coming) will reveal the value of each person's work.<sup>53</sup> With each man and woman standing before God, their life's efforts will be in their hands. While the world watches, there will be a test. The test will be through fire.<sup>54</sup>

The fire of examination will flame against the works done by the church. As the flames blaze, each one's work that has been presented will face the heat. As the illustration shows, only what has been done with an eternal perspective will survive. Paul's intention is clear: wood, hay, and straw do not last minutes in a fire. But gold, silver, and precious stones can withstand the fire, because they are made of strong material. In the example of 1 Corinthians 3, they are made to last into eternity.

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<sup>52</sup> Gordon D. Fee argues that Paul is not detailing specific actions, but he intends to explain that the works done consistent with the gospel and for Christ's sake (the precious stones) are of eternal value. What burns up, he writes, "belongs only to this age, and this age is passing away, along with all that belongs to it." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 151. The comparison is the temporal versus the eternal.

<sup>53</sup> Ridderbos confirms that the second coming and the day of judgment are simultaneous. In reference to the "day" (and noting specifically the language of 1 Cor 3), Ridderbos writes, "In all these descriptions it is a matter of a general denotation of the great future that dawns with Christ's coming." Ridderbos, *Paul*, 530-31.

<sup>54</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 153-54. Scholars debate over the Greek in 1 Cor 3 regarding "fire." There is uncertainty whether the fire will reveal the day of judgment, or if the fire is specifically concentrated on the Christians' works. Fee notes that the fire denotes the roar of the day of judgment, but the fire also serves as a mechanism to test the deeds of man. Therefore, the day will be revealed by fire (2 Pet 3:10) and the fire that reveals Christ's arrival "will test the quality of each person's work" (154). By understanding the Bible's use of "fire" as a figurative way to describe both judgment and testing, this thesis agrees with Fee's perspective.

Verse 14 continues in the illustration, and Paul clarifies the consequences of the testing by fire. He teaches that the results of the assessment correlate to eternal reward. If all an individual's legacy is placed on the altar, and after the fire rages, there is still a mass of gems left, then they will be blessed accordingly. However, if an individual's earthly decisions translate to a heap of wood, then after the fire is ceased, they will have nothing to show for it. There will only be ashes at their feet.

In this assessment, one can assume that there will be a plethora of differences in the body of Christ. There will be those with incalculable gems, some whose life resulted in a handful of precious stones, and then some who had few. It is also probable, knowing the weakness of all created beings (even those who have been redeemed), that all of humanity will have some stubble that is wasted away by fire. But the goal is to have as many special stones as possible. Because those pieces of jewelry will translate into eternal responsibility.<sup>55</sup>

Glorious news awaits in verse 15. Since salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for God's glory alone, this testing is not for salvation. This assessment is to analyze those who have already been washed by the blood of the Lamb, and he is assigning their eternal roles for the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>56</sup>

However, Paul clearly addresses in chapter 3 verse 15 that those who have been flippant about their days on earth "will suffer loss." These words are purposefully gripping. Paul is admonishing the readers, urging the church in Corinth of the importance of obedience. He is not teaching about salvation, but is pressing them to godliness, as those who have experienced new life in Christ. He is preaching to himself as a minister of

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<sup>55</sup> Helm notes the differences in final assignments: "It is clear from Scripture that . . . there will be differences in heaven . . . some will enjoy a different status in heaven from others." Helm, *The Last Things*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> Verbrugge sees the connection to eternal roles: "The reward has to do, to use the words the Jesus's parable, with whether one rules over ten cities or over five cities in the kingdom of God (Luke 19:12-19), or whether one is in charge of many things or few things in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 25:14-23)." Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, 284-85.

the gospel, as a son of the Most High, and he is exhorting those under his care to strive for the world to come. He does not want his friends to be ashamed on the day of reckoning.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, Paul's message, given through divine inspiration, is that when Christ returns, the entire family of God will stand and be counted. At this reckoning, there will be an assessment. The test will not be for salvation, for that was already settled at the cross. This judgment will be to determine where one will serve in eternity.

**Important clarifications regarding 1 Corinthians 3:5-15.** Multiple questions arise when studying this passage, and a few will be addressed. First, the standard of judgment for believers must be understood. What will determine if a decision made on earth will be gold or straw? Second, this judgment is given through the eyes of a loving Father, one who enjoys blessing his children. Therefore, the instruction to live for eternity is a motivation, not something to quench service. Finally, all the faithful works that survive the test, and the entirety of the eternal reward granted to God's people in the age to come, are completely owed to supernatural, sovereign grace.

Since the coming judgment of Christ-followers is found in the New Testament, Christians need to be aware of the basis for such a test. For those who long to acquire eternal blessings, it is necessary that the target be clear and the goal in sight. God's people need to know what they are striving toward. The coming assessment, given by the Lord Jesus Christ, will be centered on faithfulness.

In 1 Corinthians 4:2, shortly after his explanation of the day of judgment for Christians in 1 Corinthians 3, Paul elaborates on the guidelines for the assessment: "It is required of stewards that they be found faithful." The judgment of the people of God will be based on the faithfulness of one's life. The beauty, as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians,

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<sup>57</sup> Kistemaker sees the consequences for the church: "When the fire burns out, the loss of possessions is evident. . . . The text applies to every believer and thus serves as a warning never to become negligent but to labor diligently for the cause of the Lord." Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 114.

is that individuals are tested based on their own giftings, situations, and decisions. Paul will not be judged based on a comparison to Apollos. They are two unique ministers of the gospel, and both are called to be faithful. Neither is called to mimic the other, but they are to fulfill their duties as faithfully as they can.

Jesus reiterates the emphasis on faithfulness in a passage already studied in this thesis. In Matthew 25, when teaching on the parable of the talents, Jesus notes that the Master celebrates the servants who oversaw their tasks faithfully. Upon arriving home to see the fruit of their labor, the owner of the property exults, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matt 25:23). In this parable, the servants were not expected to compete against each other. They were called to be overseers of what had been specifically entrusted to them.

Therefore, the goal of the final examination will be faithfulness. Christ-followers, those who are stewards of God’s mercy, are to be found faithful. The judgment on that day will measure how faithful each Christian was to their specific calling. But how is this faithfulness measured? The faithfulness of one’s actions is to be measured based on the pursuit of the glory of God.

Jesus does not want drones who behave merely in a mechanical fashion. He desires servants who are passionately devoted to him and who love doing all things for his renown. First Corinthians 10:31 announces, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” This is the essence of the Christian life.

The cosmos exists for the glory of God. Humanity was birthed for the glory of God. The gospel is, ultimately, for the glory of God. The totality of life, whether as a vocational minister or as a layperson, is for the glory of God.

Even the Great Commandment from Matthew 22, where Jesus explains to love God and to love people, must be done for the glory of God. No matter the situation, the praise of the Lord is the only pure motivation for choices to be made. Regardless of what

occurs in a person's life, no matter how pleasant an action may look on the outside, if motives are corrupted, then the choice was not made in faithfulness.

This is the essence of the day of judgment. Ministry will not be assessed based on numbers of conversions, size of a church budget, or the amount of praise a man receives. Each man's motives, intentions, and actions will be judged before the watching eye of King Jesus. Since his omniscience knows the heart, anything done in the flesh will be worthless. Whatever was achieved apart from a desire for God's glory, or any facet that strayed from the individual's call, will evaporate in the purifying fire.

The second aspect to consider when learning about the day of judgment is that the Christian stands before the Lord as a son or a daughter. This Father, the one who gave his only Son to purchase wicked rebels at Calvary, is eager to bless his people. Romans 8 asks a rhetorical question. Paul heralds the glorious news, announcing that if God gave us Christ, since he gave us himself, will he not "also . . . graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8:32). This must be remembered as one considers the final day. He or she stands before a loving Father who will be looking for ways to bestow responsibility on his beloved. The Lord wants his people to be found faithful, and he is generous beyond measure.

The exhortation to consider the second coming and the judgment of believers is not meant to instill anxiety for those in Christ. Rather, it is supposed to be a beacon for life. God, in his infinite mercy for his people, is providing a mission. Through the teaching of the New Testament, Christians are granted a purpose for life, and are offered the opportunity to chase after eternal reward. The Lord of glory who grants new life is the one who urges his redeemed to have the right (eternal) priorities.

The Lord Jesus Christ preaches the same message in the Gospels. In Matthew 6, he encourages his listeners to live for eternity. Specifically, the God-Man praises those who seek to build up an eternal inheritance. He warns against pursuing the fleeting prizes of this life and teaches that humanity should live for the age to come. He says, "Lay up for

yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt 6:20). The triune God loves his people, and he provides the blessed chance to accrue eternal riches.

There is a peculiar glory in achieving everlasting responsibility. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul teaches that Christians will play a role in the judgment for the wicked and that those in Christ will “judge angels” (1 Cor 6:2-3). This is such an incredible honor that the reader struggles to believe it at first glance. However, those who have been faithful while on earth will have an opportunity to serve with the Lord and be used as he ushers in dominion over the forces of evil.<sup>58</sup> The majesty of the final day is incomprehensible.

Lastly, Christians should be aware that every work done in the cause of Christ, those things that survive the fire as precious stones, are all done solely by the grace of God. Therefore, at the end of the day, all of creation will praise God in this assessment. Nothing in man is capable of obedience. Nothing in the creature equips them to stay faithful. There is nothing inherent within those who came from the dust that enables them to glorify their Maker. Everything of value is accomplished through his divine power. The Lord of heaven makes all efforts for his name possible.<sup>59</sup>

Understanding the totality of God’s grace in eternal rewards magnifies the gospel. The triune God, who needs nothing, decided to make man for his glory. Though, instead of following the Creator, men and women defy him and decide that they want to take the throne. Even though such an act is worthy of damnation, God does not leave mankind hopeless. Instead, the Son of God steps out of heaven, lives the life humanity

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<sup>58</sup> While not going into specifics, Fee comments on the role Christians will have following Christ’s return: “So inclusive will be our participation in God’s eschatological judgment that not only the world but even the angels will be judged by the newly formed eschatological people of God.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 255-57.

<sup>59</sup> Helms writes that not only is entrance into heaven through grace alone, so are the eternal benefits for faithful living: “Differences in heaven are also the reward of grace . . . they are based upon the unmerited goodness of God and not upon the personally-gained merit of the believer.” Helm, *The Last Things*, 106.

could not live and dies the death each sinner deserves. He conquered sin, death, the grave, and hell for his people, and rose victoriously to reign for all time.

Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God takes his enemies, those who rebelled against his spotless name, and chases them down. Not only does the Lord of grace save them, but he washes his beloved of their sin and makes them righteous. He gifts them the perfect, alien righteousness of Christ through imputation. He takes them and sits them at his table as honored guests. They are adopted as sons and daughters, and they inherit the estate.

Following the inconceivable blessing of salvation, God then empowers each of his children to obey his commandments. As is seen in 1 Corinthians 3, he blesses their obedience (which was only achieved by his mercy) with extravagant, everlasting gifts. Enemies are turned into sons. They are enabled to work for him by his power and are rewarded as if they accomplished the tasks in their own ability.

The glory of the gospel is truly beyond words. Therefore, for all eternity, the magnificent wonder and favor of the triune God will be exalted and praised by those from every tongue, tribe, and nation. He is worthy of worship and will receive honor and glory for countless ages. This is why Paul was so enamored with the gospel and why wanted the Corinthians to behold the Lord's majesty.

## **Conclusion**

It has been argued that the New Testament teaches that Jesus's return is imminent, and when he returns, he will levy judgment. This judgment is married to the second coming, and this day is for believers and non-believers. For those outside of the faith, the results are levels of damnation, based on the vileness of their life. For Christ-followers, the assessment given when Jesus returns will be focused on eternal responsibility. The standard will be faithfulness, and the faithfulness of one's life will be measured based on what was endeavored for the glory of God.

There are two foundational consequences to consider because of this reality, and both are paramount in preaching the Word. First, each Christian must understand that he will give an account as to the stewardship of his life. Preachers must inform and propel believers to live for the age to come. Second, preachers must grasp that the entirety of their ministries will be judged. These are grave facts and are of eternal significance.

Preachers must immerse their sermons with the reality of the final day and press their audience to live for the everlasting. Such preaching is only possible when the man behind the sacred desk is one who, by God's grace, understands these things for himself, feels the weight of his frailty, and perceives his own need to live in the light of eternity. Because when a man is consumed with the Lord's assessment, he will be obsessed with faithfully administering his duties. He will preach the Word, and he will do so with urgency. The New Testament's teaching on the second coming of Christ necessitates earnest proclamation.

In the previous section, it was explained that the Lord is gracious to his people, and as a Father, he will be zealous in distributing reward to those for whom he cares. This is matchless news for those who know their own impotence. Preachers must not let that grace be used as an excuse to serve carelessly. His grace should be motivation to labor well with fear and reverence. As the book of Ecclesiastes 12:13 states, "Fear God and keep his commandments."

Ministers of the gospel care for the bride of Jesus Christ. They have been summoned to protect, lead, and feed his beloved. Of all the men in the cosmos, they have been designated to shepherd his flock. Pastors have been beckoned by the Almighty to protect those he loves, those he purchased in his own blood. The souls given to Christ by the Father have been entrusted to them to shepherd, and he will not take their stewardship lightly.

The King of glory has stepped away for a short time. He has gone on a journey and has left his bride into the care of overseers. His cherished possession, provided before eternity by the Father, has been handed to them. As he left, he gave a book of instructions. This book prescribed exactly how ministers were to care for his beloved. They are not to add to or take away from his words, but they are to know his will and follow it without hesitation. Because, one day, the King will return, and he will examine his bride. He will discover what condition she is in, and how she has been cared for.

After retrieving and embracing her, he will then seek out those tasked with serving and protecting her. Each preacher's name will be called. His life and ministry will be put on the scale, and it will be tested by fire. The only thing that will matter on that day is how he obeyed his Master and how faithful he was to fulfill his duty, for God's glory. There is no greater calling, but there is also no greater responsibility.

It is unfathomable to contemplate what will happen to false teachers on that day. In James 3, James teaches that those who handle the Word will be judged with greater strictness. Jesus warns that his wrath will have no end for those who cause his children to stumble. He says that "it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" than to face justice when he returns (Matt 18:6). Preachers are called to be ambassadors—to herald the message of their Sovereign. To articulate a different message is high treason.

Therefore, each minister should serve in the light of the imminence of the second coming, because Jesus brings judgment for the damned. Preachers must labor because those under their care will stand and give an account of their lives. Pastors must lead congregations to holiness. Ministers should lead well because their lives will be put on the scales. All that is done in Christ's service is seen by the Maker of the world, and each moment of life will be measured and will be tested. Only what has been done for Christ will last. Men of God must live for eternity, minister for eternity, and should preach with urgency.

## CHAPTER 4

### PREACHING AND CHRIST'S RETURN

In previous chapters, this thesis has demonstrated that the New Testament teaches that the second coming of Christ is imminent. Through background analysis, exegesis, and theological study, this work has shown that when Jesus returns, he brings judgment. Upon his arrival, the lost will be damned, the Christian will receive the fullness of their salvation, and all men will stand and give an account. Based on Christ's evaluation, there will be varying eternal rewards for the redeemed and levels of eternal punishment for the lost. Therefore, the world must be on guard, anticipating his arrival.

As important as it is that God's people are aware of these realities, the matters discussed thus far are not solely for academic discussion or to build theological acumen. The truths exposed from the New Testament regarding the parousia and what that means for the world should spur change. Most importantly, pulpits should be set aflame with expositors who proclaim God's truth with desperate urgency.

Based on 2 Timothy 4:1-8, this chapter will show that the apostle Paul preached in the light of the second coming. A synopsis of Paul's view of Scripture and an explanation of preaching will be included, demonstrating the connection between the return of Christ and preaching the Word. Paul not only labored with an eternal focus due to the imminence of Christ's arrival, but he also instilled the same burden into his pupils. The imminence of Christ's return and the judgment at Christ's return impacted Paul's ministry and should therefore impact the modern preacher.

The focal point of 2 Timothy 4:1-8 is verse 2. In chapter 4 verse 2, Paul charges Timothy to "preach the Word." Paul's phrase "preach the Word" is in the imperative mood, establishing the vital importance of the charge. The apostle is

advocating for the primacy of the preached Word. Preaching is not something in which pastors participate. It is to be the essential facet of their service.<sup>1</sup> Since Paul places such an emphasis on preaching the Word, it is essential that those who minister comprehend the totality of these words. In analyzing this verse (and the entire passage), the first step is to decipher *what* is to be preached; the second step is to decide *how* it must be done.

### **The Word According to Paul**

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul says to “preach the Word.” The “Word” he notes in 4:2 has already been defined in 2 Timothy 3:15-17. Just before exhorting Timothy to preach the Word, Paul exalts the Word. He magnifies the inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Paul prioritizes God’s revelation and then sets the task for the pastor. He leads Timothy to understand the glory of Scripture and then exhorts the young preacher to rightly handle the Word of life.<sup>3</sup>

For Paul, Scripture (the “Word” referred to in 2 Tim 4:2) included not only the Old Testament, but also the writings that formulate the New Testament. This is confirmed in multiple ways. First, when writing to the Corinthians, he states that his words are given by the breath of the Lord (1 Cor 2). Second, the apostle Peter confirms divine inspiration by describing the authors of sacred writ as being “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). Third, Peter also lists Paul’s correspondence as the Word of God by noting that

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<sup>1</sup> In analyzing the syntax of 2 Timothy 4:2, Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., and Cleon L. Rogers III show Paul’s intention to prioritize preaching: “Not ‘begin to preach,’ but ‘preach as your first priority.’” Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 506.

<sup>2</sup> Space does not allow me to interact with other traits of Scripture such as its clarity, authority, and power (to name a few).

<sup>3</sup> David Platt, Daniel Akin, and Tony Merida note the connectedness of Paul’s description of the Scripture in chap. 3 with the command to preach in chap. 4: “If the chapter division were not here in our Bibles, we would not be distracted from seeing the logical progression: a high view of the Bible (3:14-17) should lead to a high view of biblical preaching (4:1-4).” David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 202.

some people take Paul's letters and disparage his words for their own purposes, "as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16).

Therefore, the apostle Paul is pressing Timothy to preach the full counsel of God's revelation—what is present today in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. Nineteenth century Princeton scholar, B. B. Warfield, championed the doctrine of divine inspiration. For Warfield, the majestic truth that God revealed himself to humanity was the basis of bibliology.<sup>4</sup> The Bible is the living Word of the living God and therefore must be preached and submitted to. Warfield writes,

But God has caused his grace to abound to us in that he not only published redemption through Christ in the world, but gave this preachment authoritative expression through the apostles, and fixed it with infallible trustworthiness in his inspired word. Thus in every age God speaks directly to every Christian heart, and gives us abounding safety to our feet and divine security to our souls. And thus, instead of a mere record of a revelation given in the past, we have the ever-living word of God; instead of a mere tradition however guarded, we have what we have all learned to call in a unique sense "the Scriptures."<sup>5</sup>

Scripture is powerful, and it pierces the heart of those under its declaration. The preacher's confidence is that the Lord will speak through his Word, that which contains the fullness of "the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Such an assurance is birthed from a lofty view of God and by understanding his flawless nature. Since the Bible is from the lips of the perfect Sovereign and has his authority, it follows that the inspired text is without mistake. It is inerrant—completely absent of error. Wayne Grudem explains that biblical inerrancy testifies to "the total truthfulness and reliability of God's words":

[Biblical inerrancy] focuses on the question of truthfulness and falsehood in the language of Scripture. The definition [of biblical inerrancy] in simple terms just means that *the Bible always tells the truth*, and that it always tells the truth *concerning everything it talks about*. This definition does not mean that the Bible

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<sup>4</sup> Fred Zaspel explains that Warfield's reverence for the Bible centered on his understanding that "Scripture is God's self-revelation." It is from this principle that Warfield's perspectives were developed. Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 116.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* (Nutley, NJ: P & R, 1970, 1973), 2:540-41.

tells us every fact there is to know about any one subject, but it affirms that what it does say about any subject is *true*.<sup>6</sup>

Not only is the Bible inspired and inerrant, but it is also sufficient. Paul's description in 2 Timothy 3 that the Scriptures strengthen the Christian for "every good work" is key. Since God's Word is enough for salvation and it equips the man of God for holiness, this is where preachers must turn to prepare their people to live the Christian life.<sup>7</sup> There is no need for external authorities or the traditions of men. Louis Berkhof knew of the church's need to embrace the sufficiency of the Bible for all matters of faith and practice. He also understood the historicity of the doctrine of the Word's sufficiency. While refuting opposing views and clarifying the definition of biblical sufficiency, Berkhof writes,

Over against the position that Scripture needs some complement, the Reformers asserted the *perfectio* or *sufficiencia* of Scripture. This doctrine does not mean that everything that was spoken and written by the prophets, by Christ, and by the apostles, is incorporated in Scripture. . . . Neither does it mean that all the articles of faith are found in finished form in Scripture. . . . The Reformers merely intended to deny that there is alongside Scripture an unwritten Word of God with equal authority and therefore equally binding on the conscience. . . . Christ is presented to us as the acme of the divine revelation, the highest and the last. . . . For the knowledge of the way of salvation we are referred to Scripture only.<sup>8</sup>

So, in 2 Timothy 4:2, Timothy's responsibility was to take this inerrant revelation of God to man, that which contains all that is needed for life and godliness, and deliver it to the world. But, *how* must the Word be delivered? It must be preached. It must be heralded. It must be proclaimed.

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<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 91, emphasis original.

<sup>7</sup> George Knight describes the usefulness of the Word. When commenting on 2 Tim 3:17, he writes, "Since God created Christians for good works and calls on them to do good works . . . he has given scripture to instruct them so that they may know in principle what God expects of them and thus be equipped to do that particular 'good deed' called for in each situation." George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 450.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new combined ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 168-69.

## A Definition of Preaching

With Scripture being defined as the *what* to preach, it is now imperative to explain the *how* of preaching. To illustrate the biblical prescription to preach the Word, this section will describe the manner of preaching, the approach to preaching, and the posture of preaching. Staying within the framework of 2 Timothy 4, focus will be placed on *kerusso*, the word translated “preach” in 2 Timothy 4:2. Preaching will be defined, detailed, and shown to be God’s primary means of edifying his people and reaching the lost. This will demonstrate that preachers should be urgent in feeding the souls of the beloved while also warning and pleading with the lost.

Preaching is a supernatural event of corporate worship and it is the ultimate priority for the church and the minister. The preacher is a man of God who has been chosen, called, gifted, and sent as an ambassador of the Almighty. He is to be holy, devoted to his task, and one who communes with the Lord. The minister is a steward, one who loves the Bible and who is passionate about the truths therein. Through his service and empowered by divine favor, he heralds God’s truth to the minds and hearts of those under his care.

Preaching is the public proclamation of the Scriptures, where the preacher magnifies the Lord and leads people to worship and to action. The proclaimed Word demands a response. Preaching propels listeners to behold the glory of God and on mission. In true preaching, the preacher is the mouthpiece of God. He is a herald, one who speaks for the Lord as a modern-day prophet, grounding his messages on Jesus Christ and the gospel. Through his leadership and service, the church is edified and the lost are urged to come to saving faith.

Understanding the sacredness of his calling, the preacher serves with joy and sobriety. He trembles when he realizes the gravity of his duty, but he is confident in and fully relying upon grace. Eager to embrace the privilege to preach, his ultimate priority is God’s glory, and all his efforts work to that end. The preacher longs to be found faithful on that final day.

Preaching is a weighty enterprise where God’s Word is put on display. The preacher expounds the biblical text to his audience, exposing the fullness of the inerrant revelation. The preacher humbles men and exalts God. Saints are fed and the lost are converted—preaching is the primary means by which God saves and strengthens his own. The Lord works through the preacher and moves in power.

The preacher speaks with strength and authority, knowing the one for whom he labors. He trusts the Master who sent him, and he speaks with boldness and zeal. The preacher must know and cherish the truths he proclaims, and he should deliver his message with passionate, eloquent persuasion. His arguments are clear, logical, and cogent, and he is clothed with power from above. Preachers love those under their care and shepherd them with care and affection.

Since the preacher knows the imminence of the second coming of Christ and meditates on the consequences of that day, he preaches with urgency and earnestness. He preaches on the bliss of heaven and the horrors of hell. He realizes the gravity of what is at stake, and he is serious as he stands behind the sacred desk. He is consumed with that day and heralds the fullness of God’s revelation accordingly. Through faithful preaching and because of the severity of Christ’s return, congregations encounter the living God.

### **The Manner of Preaching: Proclamation**

To fully grasp the intricacies of 2 Timothy 4:2 and what it means to “*preach* the Word,” the original language must be analyzed. The Greek word translated “preach” in this passage is *kerusso*, which could be understood as proclaiming or heralding. The image is one of a messenger, full of power and authority, publicly announcing a king’s mandate. *Kerusso* is not used to describe a dry, philosophical lecture, where the teacher is just trying to transport information. As the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains, *Kerusso* “does not mean the delivery of a learned and edifying . . . discourse in well-chosen words and a pleasant voice. It is the declaration of an event. Its true source is

‘to proclaim.’”<sup>9</sup>

New Testament scholar Jonathan Griffiths has produced extensive literature on the language of “preach” in the New Testament. When concentrating on the specific meaning of *kerusso* and describing *how* one is to deliver God’s Word, he writes,

At the centre of the range of meaning for *kerysso* is the act of authoritative public proclamation. It usually means something like ‘declare aloud’, ‘proclaim’. The verb itself does not specify the substance of the message being proclaimed, but is normally paired with an object to give us that information. . . . It is centrally a verb that points to a mode of communication (proclaiming aloud, preaching), rather than to the communication of a particular message.<sup>10</sup>

BDAG lists multiple nuances to *kerusso*. It could mean to “make an official announcement” or to “announce, make known.” *Kerusso* could also be translated “to make public declarations, proclaim aloud.” Specifically, in 2 Timothy 4:2, BDAG connects Paul’s use of *kerusso* to “proclaim something.”<sup>11</sup> For Paul, there was only one message to proclaim: the infallible Word of the living God. Therefore, his exhortation to Timothy was to *preach the Word*.

Paul’s use of *kerusso* and the tone of the exhortation is the essence of what it means to preach the Word. Preaching is not entertainment and it is not a conversation. Preaching is not merely teaching, and it is not a laid-back presentation of thoughts. Preaching is proclamation. It is a bold declaration, accompanied with a trumpet blast. The preacher is a herald, a modern-day prophet. On a mission from the king, the preacher is a divinely ordained messenger. His burden is to give the world a message from the Almighty. To preach is to proclaim God’s truth. And it must be done with urgency.

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<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:703.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 38-39.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 543.

## **The Approach to Preaching: Expository Preaching**

The position of this thesis is that the primary means by which God builds his church and edifies his people is through Spirit-empowered proclamation of the Word. This is done most effectively through consistent biblical exposition, which is known as expository preaching. Expository preaching is an intentional approach to handling the Word of God wherein the preacher desires to expose the biblical text to the audience.

The expositor draws from the passage what is intended by the human author through the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Tony Merida explains expository preaching this way: "In short, expository preaching is *Word-centered, Word-driven, or Word-saturated* preaching. It involves explaining what God has said in his Word, declaring what God has done in his Son, and applying this message to the hearts of people."<sup>12</sup>

The preacher works to lead his listeners to embrace glorious truths from Scripture and urges them to conform the totality of their thinking to the inerrant revelation. The goal is to be transformed by the Word and to be moved toward Christlikeness. Griffiths summarizes the glories of the preached Word: "The preaching of the word of God is . . . a gift by which [God] speaks to us, encounters us, equips us for ministry, and, through the power of his Spirit, transforms us all for his glory."<sup>13</sup>

In expository preaching, what is preached is begotten from Scripture and does not originate from any other source, especially not the ideas or opinions of the speaker. The content being taught is the Bible. To decipher a text's supernatural meaning, the expositor studies the historical context, the literary genre of the biblical book, and the grammatical intricacies of the language employed. When the preacher rightly understands the Word and is captured by its greatness, he can then deliver a divine oracle to those under his care. True expository preaching, knowing a text and presenting its worth to a people,

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<sup>12</sup> Tony Merida, *The Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 16, emphasis original.

<sup>13</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, 133.

is the modern-day equivalent of “thus saith the Lord.”

When done accurately and in the power of the Holy Spirit, a God-appointed messenger targets the mind, will, and affections of the listener. The Word, when faithfully taught and accompanied by divine unction, propels the flock of God to worship and action. In expository preaching, Scripture is explained and proclaimed. The Lord’s people have their souls fed and hearts filled. He is magnified and receives all honor, glory, and praise. In other words, biblical preaching is God-centered.<sup>14</sup>

The best approach when laboring as an expositor is systematic exposition. This means the preacher should take a book of the Bible and walk through the text as it has been laid out by the original author, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This can take different forms, depending on genre, the biblical passage, and the situation of the local church. Whether a sermon is on one verse, one chapter, or one book, the primary diet of the people of God should be biblical exposition. Hershael York and Bert Decker explain, “The power of preaching lies in the inspired text of Scripture and that the preacher must preach the text with the same basic intent of the author. . . . Preaching expositionally does not necessitate a particular format . . . but the shape and direction of the sermon will be dictated by the meaning of the passage and not vice versa.”<sup>15</sup>

Church members must see the overarching themes of Scripture and need to grasp the beautiful unity of God’s revelation. Congregants also need to be shown how to study the Bible, which is best done through consecutive exposition. By explaining the background, context, literary genre, and when he exposes the surrounding material of the text, the preacher is training his flock how to study the Bible for themselves. However, if a man decides to pull verses out of context or fails to rightly expound the passage, then he

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<sup>14</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones teaches on the God-centeredness of preaching. He writes, “What is the chief end of preaching? I like to think it is this. It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 40th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 110.

<sup>15</sup> Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H, 2003), x.

is encouraging those under his care to do the same. This is devastating for an individual's sanctification and the health of the global church.

In biblical exposition, God determines the content of the message, and therefore the church is fed as he sees fit, not on what the preacher deems best. Expository preaching, when done faithfully, kills any efforts to ignore difficult topics or passages. The preacher does not present his own hobbies each week, but he brings a message from the Almighty.

When an expositor labors in the light of eternity and preaches in accordance with Scripture, four emphases will saturate his sermons: the glory of God, Jesus Christ, the gospel, and mission. The glory of God is the ultimate purpose of the cosmos and therefore must be heralded accordingly. Jesus Christ is preeminent over all things, and he reigns and rules. He is perfect, the only Creator and the only Savior. He should be presented as such. The gospel should be intertwined into every message because God's mission to glorify himself by saving sinners is precious news to the world. The redeemed can rejoice and worship, while the lost can be warned and urged to trust in Christ. The redemptive narrative of history must be preached. Finally, the church should be propelled to mission. Preaching leads to action. This begins with the Great Commandment, to love the Lord and love people, and continues with the Great Commission: making disciples of all nations. Both should be pursued for the glory of the triune God.

### **The Posture of Preaching: Serious, Earnest, and Urgent**

There is no more important vocation than to be a preacher of the Word. Therefore, when a man has been set apart by the sovereign King of the universe to preach, he must devote himself to his craft. He should be intent on knowing his Maker and living a pious life.<sup>16</sup> He needs to be serious in his duty—reverent about the opportunity to speak

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<sup>16</sup> In defining and teaching on expository preaching, Jim Scott Orrick, Brian Payne, and Ryan Fullerton exalt the priority of the preacher's holiness. The first chapter of their book is titled "The Man Matters." Not only is the information in this chapter helpful, but by opening the book with such a focus, they set a high standard for preachers. They write, "God desires the ministry of preaching and teaching to be done by men who are holy, qualified, and progressing." Jim Scott Orrick, Brian Payne, and Ryan Fullerton,

on behalf of the Lord. He must have an overwhelming burden that he is shepherding souls who will one day enter into eternity. The pulpit is no place for silliness or levity.

John Piper characterizes the appropriate posture for a preacher of the gospel. Connecting *kerusso* (to proclaim, to herald) with the one who is to deliver the message and the way he should conduct himself, Piper writes, “A herald (*keryx*) who communicated by his demeanor that he did not revere his king, or regard his message as valuable, was nearing treason. To speak as a herald was to communicate not only the truth but also the value of the message and the majesty of the authority behind it.”<sup>17</sup>

When a man meditates on the one who compels him to speak, he will labor with a holy sobriety. When he contemplates the eternal subject matter of his message, he will be zealous in preparation and resolute to rightly handle the Word. When the preacher comprehends the imminence of the second coming and understands that souls hang in the balance, he will be urgent to lead his listeners to ready themselves for the age to come.

The preacher must know Scripture and should spend long hours studying and petitioning his Savior. Then, after communing with the Lord, he must stand up straight, open the Bible, and proclaim its contents in earnest. The preacher is to take God’s inerrant revelation, pour himself into prayer and study, and with a fire in his bones, herald the message of his Master. This is to be done week in and week out, verse by verse, with an unrelenting passion to glorify God, edify the beloved, and reach the nations. This is what it means to be a preacher, and this is what Paul was relaying to Timothy.

### **Second Timothy 4:1-8: An Exhortation to Preach in Earnest**

With an understanding of what Paul meant by “preach the Word,” 2 Timothy 4:1-8 will now be exegeted to solidify the connection between the second coming of Christ

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*Encountering God Through Expository Preaching: Connecting God’s People to God’s Presence Through God’s Word* (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 3.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 61.

and preaching. The context, background, and surrounding verses of 2 Timothy 4:1-8 will be explained, granting insight into the fullness of the passage. The apostle Paul's charge to Timothy will serve as evidence for the divine mandate to preach while meditating on the parousia. This passage is the culmination of Paul's awareness of the imminence of the second coming and the judgment it brings. Paul understood the eternal implications for those under his care and he was consumed with his own obligations before his Maker.

### **Context**

The three Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim, 2 Tim, and Titus) were penned by the apostle Paul to men he had trained and then sent to shepherd local congregations. Timothy, the recipient of this epistle, was a young minister serving in Ephesus.<sup>18</sup> Timothy and Paul were co-laborers in the gospel, and their relationship was so close that the apostle referred to young Timothy as his "child in the faith" (1 Tim 1:2).

Ephesus, where Timothy was pastoring, was a difficult context. The city was full of paganism, and its population was obsessed with the occult.<sup>19</sup> Idolatry and sexual immorality were rampant, and the people of God were called to be lights in the darkness.<sup>20</sup> The congregation in Ephesus had been devoted to the gospel in previous days, but some members were beginning to wander. Living and worshipping in such an anti-

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<sup>18</sup> John Gill notes Timothy's location and connects the importance of seeing the continuity from Paul's first letter to Timothy. Paul desired Timothy to serve in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3) and this follow-up letter was encouraging him in his service there. John Gill, *Galatians to Revelation*, Exposition of the Old and New Testaments, vol. 9 (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 315.

<sup>19</sup> Explaining the reason for the heathen situation in Ephesus, Platt, Akin, and Merida write, "Since the temple of Artemis was located in Ephesus, the cult of Artemis was especially influential in this Imperial capital. This cult affected commercial activity, and it seems to have engulfed a number of other cult practices." Platt, Akin, and Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy*, 3-4.

<sup>20</sup> Warren Wiersbe comments on the sexual promiscuity in Ephesus as he introduces Paul's letters to Timothy: "The city was devoted to the worship of Diana, the patroness of the sexual instinct. Her lascivious images helped promote sexual immorality of all kinds (see Acts 19)." Warren W. Wiersbe, *Ephesians-Revelation*, The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament, vol. 2 (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 210.

Christian world is never easy, and the visible church was struggling.<sup>21</sup>

Second Timothy is the last letter in the biblical corpus written by Paul, meaning that, chronologically, these are the final words given by the apostle.<sup>22</sup> In 1:8 and 1:16-17, Paul refers to himself as the Lord's prisoner, bound in chains, which alludes to his being imprisoned in Rome.<sup>23</sup> Since he was in a dire situation, Paul explains that he expects to be carried to heaven very soon, stating "the time of my departure has come" (2 Tim 4:6). Believing he was in his final days, the apostle longed to implore his pupil to focus on the essentials of ministry, and he also wanted to finish his race well. Paul hoped to be found faithful when he saw Jesus face to face.

He begins his communication with Timothy by urging him to stand fast in the gospel. In chapter 1, Paul reminds the young preacher of his faith and his calling and implores Timothy to be strong in Christ. During a time of difficulty, Paul knew Timothy needed to be encouraged in the glory of the gospel and be exhorted to not give way in the face of opposition. Aware of specific issues the young man faced, Paul explained how to combat worldliness and how Timothy should handle divisive people (2:14-3:9).

To stand firm, Paul directed Timothy to the Word as his foundation. In 3:10-17, Paul exalts the clarity, power, sufficiency, and faithfulness of Scripture. By teaching the preeminence of the Bible, Paul was granting his student a bedrock of stability for the current season of difficulty, as well as a lifetime of ministry. Paul believed his days were short, and he wanted Timothy to trust in God's Word, and not in any man. With the

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<sup>21</sup> John MacArthur explains the setting of 2 Tim: "The church at Ephesus had fallen still further into corrupt theology and ungodly behavior . . . heresy, apostasy, and even persecution had become more destructive." John MacArthur, *2 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), x.

<sup>22</sup> In introducing the pastoral epistles, Knight goes into detail regarding the letters and provides potential dates for Paul's writing. Timing Paul's writing to the reign of Nero, he explains, "The date of 2 Timothy [is] (as early as 64 and as late as 67), i.e., from the latter part of the early 60s to the mid-60s." Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> In his analysis of 2 Tim 1, Philip Towner notes Paul's imprisonment by Roman authorities. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Titus and Timothy*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 464, 483.

situation and the authority of Scripture in view, 2 Timothy 4:1-8 can be explained.

## Exegesis

Death bed conversations are special because in those moments, the one who is on the doorstep of eternity longs to export the most important burdens to loved ones. In the case of Paul and Timothy, 2 Timothy 4 contains the final words in the final biblical letter Paul would ever write. To rightly understand 2 Timothy 4, it is vital that one grasps the lasered, eternal focus of Paul.<sup>24</sup> He believed he was about to meet his Lord, and his disciple was flailing. Paul wrote to encourage his young companion, to remind him of his duty, and to clarify the primary responsibility for a shepherd. These verses should be understood as the summation of Paul's concern for God's glory, Timothy, Timothy's ministry, and the people of God.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, in the final exhortation Paul would give to his student and the last inspired words he would leave for the universal church, what does he exhort Timothy to do? The answer is found in 4:2: *preach the word*. However, Paul goes further in his lesson to the young preacher. Not only must he proclaim the word, but he needs to do so because of the consequences of the final day. Because the day, the moment of Christ's return, would be when all men face the Judge. While Paul was excited about his eternal reward, he was encouraging Timothy to labor for eternity and to prepare all his listeners to do the same.

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<sup>24</sup> Herman Ridderbos gleans the same emphasis from Paul. He sees the unction of Paul's work emanate from his focus on eternity and the second coming. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 487-97.

<sup>25</sup> R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chappell pick up on the earnestness of Paul as he writes to Timothy: "Passion and urgency ooze from Paul's pen as he addresses Timothy. The purpose of the letter is to charge Timothy to persevere in the ministry of the gospel—to fill the apostle's immense gospel sandals." R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chappell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 182.

In verse 1, Paul issues his “charge” to Timothy. It is a summons, a command, and a sober challenge for Timothy to fulfill his calling as a minister of the gospel.<sup>26</sup> The ultimate task for the minister is to “preach the word” (v. 2), and it is a divine charge. This call to preach originates from the Almighty. The one who chooses men to serve requires that they do so with faithfulness. Because, as Paul continues in verse 1, every preacher ministers under the peering eye of King Jesus.<sup>27</sup>

The exhortation to herald God’s truth is coupled with multiple motivations, which are interconnected. In fact, they are inseparable from one another. First, Paul instills the importance of the preacher’s faithfulness, which is why he mentions the presence of the Lord who is watching Timothy in verse 1. Jesus Christ keeps a record as Timothy serves the flock under his care. Timothy must spend his days living and serving for the glory of God, rightly fulfilling his calling.<sup>28</sup>

The Lord’s gaze on Timothy’s life and ministry is monumental because the triune God is the one who will analyze the young preacher’s work. The objective of the minister of the gospel is to be found faithful. God has set each preacher apart and given him a task to complete. Therefore, as he serves, his goal should be to please his Master. The one who called the preacher is the one who is analyzing his days. He is watching to see whether each man labors faithfully.

The second motivation Paul develops centers on the final judgment, when all men will stand and give an account of their lives. This Lord, the one watching Timothy’s

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<sup>26</sup> Donald Guthrie describes the weight of the “charge” in v. 1, especially noting the relationship between Paul and Timothy: “The solemnity of the present charge is doubly impressive as the parting advice of the aged warrior to his younger and rather timid lieutenant.” Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 184.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin magnifies the gravity of v. 1 when he comments, “Paul adds a solemn charge, exhibiting to Timothy God as the avenger, and Christ as the judge, if he shall cease to discharge his office of teaching.” John Calvin, *2 Timothy, Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 252.

<sup>28</sup> MacArthur picks up on the calling to faithful stewardship: “In the present text, Paul’s focus is on the Lord’s judgment of believers . . . and the emphasis is . . . on the excellence of [the preacher’s] own ministry in light of that judgment.” MacArthur, *2 Timothy*, 169.

efforts, is the Judge “who is to judge the living and the dead” (v. 1). The notes being kept by Jesus as Timothy ministers will be exposed on the final day—when Jesus rises to judge mankind. Therefore, Paul warns that Timothy must preach envisioning that moment. Each decision must be weighed based on its worth in the light of eternity.

The third motivation is the “appearing” of Jesus Christ at the second coming (v. 1). The next time Jesus appears is the parousia, the hour when Timothy will stand and give an account. As chapter 3 of this thesis argued, everyone’s work will be weighed on the scales. Timothy’s testing by fire will take place when Jesus descends from heaven. Paul is motivating Timothy to preach the Word because of the second coming.<sup>29</sup>

The fourth motivation to note from 2 Timothy 4:1 is the glory of the new heavens and the new earth, or as Paul describes it, “his kingdom.” Paul explains that Jesus is watching Timothy’s ministry and he is returning. When he appears, he will judge the world and usher in the eternal state.<sup>30</sup> Upon that judgment, Timothy will be assigned eternal responsibilities. There is a direct correlation to Timothy’s faithfulness and the eternal consequences revealed at the second coming. Therefore, *preach the Word*.

When the motivations listed are taken together, it is unmistakable that the opening words of 2 Timothy 4 are a summons to preach the Word in the light of the second coming. Paul links the record of Timothy’s work (recorded through Jesus’s presence) with the final judgment, Christ’s appearing in glory, and the eternal state. These define the second coming.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker also ground Paul’s urgency in the fullness of the second coming. They detail all that will take place when Christ returns, and since his return is imminent and certain, Timothy must labor accordingly. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 308.

<sup>30</sup> Calvin connects the intensity of the second coming with Christ’s ushering in the new heavens and the new earth: “The appearance of Christ and his kingdom mean the same thing. . . . His kingdom will therefore be established at that time when, having vanquished his enemies, and either removed or reduced to nothing every opposing power, he shall display his majesty.” Calvin, *2 Timothy*, 252-53.

<sup>31</sup> Towner notes Paul’s emphasis on the second coming and its impact for Timothy’s ministry: “In commissioning Timothy, Paul’s eschatological orientation is clear. He swears (adjures) on these

Not only are such truths prevalent in the passages studied in this thesis, but the totality of the Pauline corpus is full of similar teaching. The apostle Paul was consumed with the second coming of Christ and what that meant for eternity. He endeavored to transfer such a perspective to Timothy.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, he opened the final chapter in the final letter of the final book he would write with a vision of Jesus's glorious return. With an emphasis on the second coming, Paul defines the mission: *preach the Word*.

After giving the charge to preach the Word in verse 2, Paul encourages Timothy to "be ready in season and out season," because teaching God's truth is not always eagerly received. No matter what the reaction is, the preaching of the Word should be consistent, relentless, and steady. Whether the crowd affirms or whether they scoff, the pastor must herald the divine witness. The apostle is warning that opposition will come. While Timothy should be aware of this, he must not shrink from his duty. Timothy is to be devoted to what has been entrusted to him: preaching the Word.<sup>33</sup>

Verses 3-4 warn about the consequences of Timothy's duty: souls depend on preaching, lives hang in the balance, and eternity is coming when the host of mankind will stand before its Maker. Listeners need solid preaching because there is temptation to leave the teaching that lays men bare and run to frauds who will "suit their own passions." Despising the conviction brought about by accurate exposition, men and women seek to escape unpleasant emotions. Instead of fleeing to the safe arms of Jesus, they prefer to

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eschatological realities (judgment, parousia, kingdom) because these symbols represent the fulfillment of bedrock realities that were formerly sworn on." Towner, *The Letters to Titus and Timothy*, 599.

<sup>32</sup> Ridderbos writes extensively on Paul's focus on the age to come. Not only did Paul live in the light of the second coming, but he implored the church to do the same. Ridderbos notes, "Again and again the apostle confronts the church with the day of Christ, on which it will have to appear before its Lord pure and blameless. . . . Its calling to holiness and blamelessness he places in the very concrete light of the expected coming of the Lord. . . . It is with a view to that approaching day that believers are to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light." Ridderbos, *Paul*, 487.

<sup>33</sup> Describing the nature of preaching, Hughes and Chappell write, "Understand that the call to preach is not a matter of preference or natural giftedness. . . . If God has called you to preach, that must be the signature of your soul and life . . . that is, whether it is convenient or inconvenient. You must not reserve preaching only to when you feel like it, or when you are psychologically ready, or when the time seems good." Hughes and Chappell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 268-69.

“accumulate,” to heap up, a slew of false teachers. Some speakers will say what the masses want to hear, allowing the opinion of the pew to define the material from the pulpit.<sup>34</sup> By doing so, many will “turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” The desperate state of those who behave in this manner cannot be overstated. Since this is a reality, the calling for preachers is lofty.

The need for preaching applies to both the Christian and the unregenerate. Both groups will face the Lord when he returns, and they need to be prepared. Such preparation takes place through the preached Word. For the lost, the need for God’s truth to be proclaimed is the hope of salvation. As Paul teaches in Romans 10:14, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” The preaching of the gospel is the primary means by which God saves his own and builds his church. The Lord has ordained to convert the lost through the preaching of the Word.

For the converted, the need for biblical preaching is just as important, but for different reasons. The Christian needs to sit under preaching for their edification. Not only does passionate proclamation inform the people of God, but it equips them to live for holiness, guards against sinfulness, and grants them hope for the life to come. The worries of the world fall away when a man of God nourishes the souls under his care on a consistent basis. Lastly, the church needs the preached Word so that they can accumulate eternal rewards. The more a Christ-follower listens to and submits to faithful preaching, the more devoted he will be to chase after Christ, live for his glory, and see life in the context of eternity. For Christ-followers who minimize preaching, the consequence will be a loss of reward at the day of reckoning.

Sheep are prone to wander, and the congregants in Ephesus were no different.

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<sup>34</sup> Hendriksen and Kistemaker recognize the gravity of Paul’s message: “In every period of history . . . men will not endure or tolerate the truth. . . . They have ears that are itching . . . their craving is for teachers to suit their fancies or perverted tastes.” Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 311-12.

The mind is not neutral—church attenders will fill their minds with some type of material, and the faithful preacher floods the minds of listeners with soul-sustaining fare. To reject truth is to wander into myths, and Paul was pleading with Timothy to protect his audience from such a consequence. The call remains the same to this day.

Those who reject God’s messengers may face his judgment before death. In 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, Paul explains that for those who despise the truth, “God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” If an individual craves flattery or temporal preaching, then God grants them the desire of their hearts. False teachers are the Lord’s judgment on a rebellious people.

In chapter 4 verse 5, Paul points Timothy back to his starting point in verse 1: faithfulness. Paul, after explaining that many will stray from the truth and there will be countless charlatans who profess to labor in the name of Christ, reiterates that the calling for Timothy was to be faithful. Paul is reminding his pupil to look to Jesus and meditate on the final day. The second coming is imminent; therefore, Timothy must give his life to fulfill his responsibility.<sup>35</sup>

In verses 6-7, Paul notes that he thinks he will die soon. By God’s grace, he was faithful to his calling. In the Lord’s mercy, he labored in the light of eternity and Christ’s coming, so the counsel he was giving Timothy was not foreign to him. Paul was retelling the burdens of his life and ministry. From the moment of his conversion and calling, Paul had been obsessed with his Master and had gazed into eternity. His mission had been to fulfill his specific calling for the glory of God because he was resolved to be rewarded on the final day.

The joy for the faithful apostle is found in verse 8. Since he was saved by God’s grace and then equipped to run the race of faith, Paul was eager to meet his Lord. In the

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<sup>35</sup> Noting the need to fulfill one’s duty, Guthrie writes, “Timothy is putting his hand to the plough and must not look back until his ministry . . . is completed.” Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 187.

closing verse of the passage, Paul reveals the glory of eternity and the fruit of his life, which he knows will be made manifest at the second coming of Christ. Paul labored well and was expectant for the second coming and judgment day. He wanted his young friend to be prepared as well.

The closing words of verse 8 are the implications for the world. For those in Christ, those who look to “his appearing” with hopefulness, the second coming will be a glorious event.<sup>36</sup> Faithful laborers, those who are excited when they think about that day, will hear the words of Matthew 25:23: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

For the unconverted, or for those who are born again but have wasted their lives by not living for God’s glory, the second coming will be a day of loss.<sup>37</sup> Paul points to one person in particular, an example of what it means to fail to live for eternity. In verse 10, the apostle Paul tells of “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” The indication is that Demas was a believer, but he had abandoned Paul out of fear, worldly concerns, or temporal issues.<sup>38</sup> Paul was exhorting Timothy to live for eternity, minister in the light of the second coming, and live each day as if in a few moments he would be standing in front of King Jesus, giving a report of the time he spent on earth. With that motivation, faithfully preaching the Word is done with diligence, seriousness, and urgency.

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<sup>36</sup> When commenting on v. 8, Hendriksen and Kistemaker write, “Note the word love . . . of all the indications that one loves the Lord, this earnest longing for his return is one of the best, for such a person is not thinking only of himself and of his own glory but also of his Lord and of the latter’s public vindication. For all such persons the wreath is waiting.” Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 317.

<sup>37</sup> For the unregenerate, it will be damnation, for the converted, it will be loss of potential reward, as was studied in the analysis of 1 Cor 3 in chap. 3 of this thesis.

<sup>38</sup> When commenting on Demas, Calvin explains that Demas should not be considered a false convert. But Calvin also offers a stinging rebuke: “He merely preferred his private convenience, or his safety, to the life of Paul . . . [he] cared more about himself than about Christ.” Calvin, *2 Timothy*, 264-65.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter argued that the apostle Paul labored in the light of eternity and was consumed with the second coming of Christ. Paul knew of the imminence of Christ's return and meditated on the final judgment that accompanied the parousia. Since he was sober about the grave consequences of that day, Paul labored in earnest and urged those he loved to do the same.

Paul preached in the light of the second coming and led others to follow his example. Through background study, exegesis, and an overview of expository preaching, this chapter has concluded that the biblical prescription for ministry is to proclaim the Word in earnest. Because of the second coming, men of God are summoned, they are charged, to herald the oracles of God with blazing urgency.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

This thesis began by exposing the lack of urgency in the modern pulpit and the tendency for some preachers to fill their preaching with temporal matters. The eternal emphasis missing from many pastors was evidenced by the 2018 Ligonier Ministries study, which found that a large percentage of professing evangelicals questioned the reality of Christ's return, the coming judgment, and the existence of hell. This thesis argued that the lack of understanding exposed by Ligonier's survey was due to lethargic preaching. Preachers are either uninformed on these biblical issues or are apathetic to their gravity, and such preaching malpractice must be corrected.<sup>1</sup> A correct understanding of the parousia propels urgent proclamation and a misunderstanding of the second coming inhibits preaching. The fullness of Christ's return should motivate those who preach to herald God's truth with power, because they are consumed with the age to come.

Chapters 2 and 3 defended the argument by showing that the New Testament teaches that Jesus's return is imminent, and when he arrives, he will bring judgment for both the wicked and the redeemed. The eternal consequences for all men were detailed, and it was shown that both the Christian and the damned will experience eternities that correspond to the way they lived.

It was explained that preaching in earnest, due to the weight of eternity, is beneficial to both the church and the world. The Christian is comforted, can have hope during hard times, and can be spurred to live faithfully to God's decrees. The

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Clowney highlights both the diagnosis and the remedy provided in this thesis: "Preaching that has lost urgency and passion reveals a loss of the eschatological perspective of the New Testament." Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 67.

unconverted must be warned and pleaded with to come to saving faith, and the entirety of humanity should be informed of the fleeting nature of life. These realities should overwhelm every preacher and result in earnest proclamation. The second coming could occur in an instant, and Christ's return has substantial consequences for mankind. Therefore, men must preach the Word.

Chapter 4 confirmed the evidence given in chapters 2 and 3 and included a specific focus on preaching. It was shown that the apostle Paul lived and ministered in the light of the second coming, and he pressed his mentees to do the same. Second Timothy 4 was unpacked to reveal what it means to preach with eyes set on the age to come. These verses provided a biblical prescription for preaching, showing that to preach is to proclaim. Since the preacher is consumed with everlasting realities and meditates on the second coming, he is a herald and is resolved to passionately announce God's truth.

With the problem presented and the thesis stated and defended, it is now essential that the weight of these truths leave a lasting impact on the global church. The matters of this thesis touch the heart of the church and must be addressed immediately. Two groups must feel the gravity of this thesis and respond accordingly. The first is the corporate church around the world, composed of individual congregations. The second set of people who must act on the truths of this thesis are preachers.

For the church at large, and specific fellowships in particular, there are four major implications of this thesis. First, the church must repent. The church must fall on its face before the Lord and corporately ask forgiveness for its waywardness. God's people need to admit their infatuation with other methodologies and seek his mercy for such neglect. Second, Christians must pray. They should plead with God and beg him to revitalize pulpits and to raise up a generation of heralds who preach with a commitment to eternal realities. Third, the church must prioritize the preaching of the Word, and must demand that preachers rightly divide God's truth and do so for his glory, the good of the flock, and the reaching of the nations. The primacy of preaching should begin in each

pulpit and every congregation should center its life on the ministry of the Word. Lastly, believers should celebrate faithful preaching. Those who labor in the light of eternity and who preach with a divine unction should be praised and thanked for their service.

For preachers, this thesis endeavors to serve as a summons. It is a charge, based on the Word of the living God, for men to stand and proclaim. And when they proclaim, they must do so with a gaze into eternity, zealously preaching the oracles of the Lord. Preachers must pray, they must pursue God, they must prepare, and they must preach the Word with urgency, because of the second coming of Christ.

### **Implications for Local Congregations**

While there are other proofs of the need for urgency in the pulpit today, the Ligonier study is sobering. The seeming lack of awareness regarding the second coming of Christ is greatly troubling. Such a study reveals symptoms of a people who are not meditating on eternal matters. The remedy comes, by God's grace, through the preached Word.

R. L. Dabney connects the health of the church with the faithfulness of preaching. As he charts the history of the church and its seasons of vitality, he writes: "The state of the pulpit may always be taken as an index of the Church. Whenever the pulpit is evangelical, the piety of the people is in some degree healthy; a perversion of the pulpit is surely followed by spiritual apostasy in the Church."<sup>2</sup> Churches around the globe must contemplate the age to come and must adjust according.

When the church realizes the weight of the second coming, and what it means for each Christian and the lost world, the church must be resolved to change. Believers need to grasp their need for biblical preaching and should do all they can to encourage men to preach the Word. Based on this thesis, the church must repent, pray, prioritize preaching, and should thank those who are faithful to the task of preaching in the light of

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<sup>2</sup> R. L. Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching* (1870; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 27.

eternity.

### **The Church Must Repent**

In Revelation 2, Jesus is speaking to the church in Ephesus. As he addresses them, he lobbies a rebuke. He tells them they have “abandoned the love [they] had at first” (v. 4). Then he commands that they change, while giving a stern warning: “Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen; repent. . . . If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (v. 5). The church in Ephesus had abandoned intimacy with their Savior and had placed multiple aspects of church life above making him known to the world.<sup>3</sup>

In this hour of the church age, much of the church has abandoned its biblical and historical commitment to the preaching of the Word.<sup>4</sup> When considering Revelation 2, the tragedy is that Christ will remove his power from congregations who forget the primary responsibility of Christian ministry: urgently preaching the Word in the light of eternity. The idea of God’s discipline for a lack of obedience must be taken seriously. Even the possibility of the church losing its potency should cause dismay in the hearts of his people.

In the typical congregation the average sermon length seems to have been shortened over time.<sup>5</sup> Churches have cut services and replaced the preaching of the Word

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<sup>3</sup> G. K. Beale explains that Jesus’s rebuke is specifically that the church in Ephesus had failed to express their devotion to him by sharing his majesty with the watching world. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 230-33.

<sup>4</sup> David Larsen’s efforts detail God’s work through the preached Word throughout history. As he opens his massive collection of testimony and quotes from faithful preachers, he explains his motivations for writing. He believes the modern church is ignorant of biblical preaching and is largely aloof to God’s work over the years: “Preaching in our time is in a dither. . . . This then is the hour in which we need the perspective of history and the sense of what preaching really is over against its biblical and historical roots.” David L. Larsen, *The Company of Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 1:9.

<sup>5</sup> One way this is seen is by comparing the primitive church’s sermons to the modern day. It is believed that the book of Hebrews was originally delivered as a sermon. If read completely in one sitting, it takes just under one hour to complete the whole book. In Heb 13:22, the writer comments on his “brief” word of exhortation. Today, a fifty-minute sermon would not be considered brief.

with activities and programs.<sup>6</sup> Congregants do not seem to grasp the vitality of the preaching of the Word and how precious it is for their souls. Because of this failure to appreciate the Lord's means of grace through preaching, some members complain about sermon length or the depth of an expositor's preaching.<sup>7</sup>

One wonders if congregations would have the same views if they felt the burden of the second coming. If each Christ-follower were aware that the day of judgment could occur at any moment, would they have a different view of preaching? If they realized the fleeting nature of life and had their eyes opened to the glory of what is to come, would they crave preaching? This thesis argues that they would.

In the New Testament, those receiving Paul's letters were from all classes of society. Some in the first century church were slaves, many being illiterate. But they were hungry for the Word and sat under the Apostles' teaching, which was full of deep theological material. How were they passionate about listening to preachers and having their souls fed by the proclaimed Word? Because they knew of the age to come and thought regularly of their final home.

With just a cursory view of the most popular speakers in the modern era, it is heartbreaking to see what many professing Christians are drawn to. Temporal preaching is rampant, and the personalities on the stage tend to provide anything but passionate exposition.<sup>8</sup> Many stages are centers for the applause of man, contain lessons centered on

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<sup>6</sup> For example, only a few decades ago, most conservative Southern Baptist churches would have a Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night corporate gathering. In each meeting, there would typically be a sermon given (even if the evening messages were abbreviated). In the modern context, Sunday night gatherings are becoming rare, and events or small groups seem to be the primary focus during the week.

<sup>7</sup> While commenting on the need for better preaching in the pulpit, T. David Gordon recognizes a typical complaint from congregants: "Ask the average churchgoer if he wishes his minister would preach a little longer or a little briefer, and nearly everyone will say, 'A little [or a lot] briefer.'" T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 30.

<sup>8</sup> Along with charlatans who grab the attention of many, the massive expanse of the "prosperity gospel" is further proof of the professing church's worldly thinking. While there may be many individuals in the prosperity gospel movement who are unconverted, it is shocking that such theological views can even be referred to as Christian. If more pulpits were fulfilling the call to feed the people of God with the Word

this world, and revolve around the individual. The lectern has been replaced by a lounge chair, and jokes and entertainment reign supreme. In many places, just the idea of a pulpit being front and center is considered obtuse. God's glory is not addressed, and eternity is not considered. As a result, the visible church has false converts, the church has too many spiritual infants, and the lost are dying and going to hell unwarned. This is the fruit of years of temporal conversations, counseling services, and personality-driven messages marketed as preaching.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this rebuke is to open the eyes of the church to the reality of the situation. Much of the church today is impotent, making little impact on the world. The world is seemingly becoming more corrupt, and local churches are failing to wage war on the forces of evil. This should cause the church to weep, to mourn, and to repent. As Paul told the Corinthians, "godly grief produces a repentance" (2 Cor 8:10).

Therefore, God's people must repent and reform. The church must admit that we have replaced the primacy of the preached Word with other activities. Christians are guilty of taking what is ungodly and calling it Christian service. Or, congregations have taken what is good and even beneficial and moved it to the forefront.<sup>10</sup>

The modern listener is too easily amused and fails to see the importance of Spirit-anointed preaching that is consumed with the second coming of Christ. The church needs a reformation in its pulpits. The church and the nations need a revival of biblical

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of God, then it would be obvious that the showmen (and women) gaining in popularity are incompatible with the teaching of Jesus Christ.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon states his assessment of the modern church: "Many, many individuals today have never been under a steady diet of competent preaching." Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Lawson notices the lack of biblical preaching today and comments on the tendency to misalign priorities in the church. He writes,

Much of evangelical preaching has become impotent, and sadly, too few realize it. Like Samson from whom the Spirit departed without his knowing it, many pastors seem to have little awareness that God's power has vanished from their once-dynamic pulpits. Rather than preaching with renewed fervor, they are preoccupied with pouring their energies into secondary strategies . . . to build their churches. While *some* of these augmentations *may* have a secondary place in the church, the crying need of the hour is for divine power to be restored to evangelical pulpits. (Steven J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land: A Passionate Call for Expository Preaching* [Chicago: Moody, 2003], 57).

preaching: earnest proclamation of the Word of God, focused on eternity, because of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

### **The Church Must Pray**

With an awareness of the need for change in the church, local bodies of believers must pray. Believers must come before the Lord, admit their failures, and plead for his grace. For only in his power can anything be changed.

The glorious news is that the Father lavishes favor on his church, and he is eager to bless the church's efforts. As his people align with his priorities, they can confidently approach him and ask for his blessing. He delights in seeing his people edified, and he can raise up a legion of men who are faithful preachers of the Word.

The prayer of the church must include several factors. First, believers should pray and ask God to glorify himself in all they do as a people. The church should look to the Lord and proclaim its desire for him to make much of himself. Christians need to come humbly yet confident that by the Spirit's power, on behalf of the work of Jesus Christ, God can magnify his name around the globe through the preaching of the Word. Hearts should align with the Master's so that the world will know that he alone is the LORD.<sup>11</sup>

Second, the church should pray and ask the Lord to bless those for whom Christ died. God has decreed that the preaching of the Word be the primary means by which he feeds his people. Therefore, the church must ask him to bless his decree. He has sovereignly orchestrated all things so that preachers are his messengers and a means of grace to strengthen his bride. As congregations pray according to his Word, they can trust that he will bear his arm and bless the requests of the saints.

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<sup>11</sup> This is stated repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, testifying to the fact that God does all things for his own glory. Specifically, in Ezekiel the LORD proclaims that he will move in power so that "they shall know that I am the LORD" (7:27).

Third, churches must petition the Lord so that souls can be saved. Preaching is also the primary means by which God redeems sinners, and therefore prayers must be made accordingly. Believers should remind him that there are places where he is not worshipped, and there are more of his elect to be converted. Through the heralding of the gospel, lives are transformed, worshippers are raised up, and nations bow before King Jesus. God's people should pray to that end.

Fourth, the church must ask the Lord for men. The church must beg him to raise up a generation of heralds who are committed to his divine ways. The redeemed should plead for a plethora of ministers who are consumed by the majesty of their Maker and have been captivated by his glory. Because those are the men who will preach. Those are the servants of God who will stand and proclaim. They are the heralds, the modern-day prophets.

The King of glory can build men who are devoted to him and who will give their dying breath to preach the Word. He has the power to form preachers who are zealous for holiness and who love his people. As Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). May the church be found committed to praying for the Almighty to raise up preachers for his fame.

### **The Church Must Prioritize Preaching**

As believers repent and pray for God's favor in the biblical approach to church life and ask him for men to serve, they must be resolved to prioritize preaching. Churches around the world must be steadfast in the conviction to preach at all costs. In the book of Acts, the apostles devoted themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (6:4). No matter what else takes place, the modern church should imitate the primitive church.

Regardless of the comments from lax church attenders, and despite the opinions of the watching world, preaching should be put on a pedestal. It must be lifted high, placed above all other facets of church activities, and should be the premier form of discipleship.

There is no back-up plan, no secondary approach. God has ordained the preaching of the Word to be the center of church life, and God's people should submit to his will. Let all the other programs and activities fail, but preaching will not falter.<sup>12</sup>

If the church of Jesus Christ would band together and commit to the preaching of the Word, there could be an awakening unlike this world has ever seen. The magnificence of the triune God would be lifted high, and his name would expand to every inch of the globe. Local congregations would be solidified in the gospel and God's people would be strengthened. Communities would be transformed, generations would be impacted, and Christ would be known by every tongue and tribe. The lost would be saved, and the foundations of hell would be shaken as the demonic faced the unstoppable force of the church militant. Once the primacy of the Word is revived to its rightful place, the potential results are limitless.

### **The Church Must Celebrate Faithful Preaching**

While this section has included rebuke and a challenge for change, the good news is that Jesus Christ will build his church. No matter how bleak the hour looks, he is always at work, and he has thousands who have not bowed the knee to Baal. His men are still alive, laboring well, and he continues to raise up others to follow in their footsteps.

As he redeems his bride, Jesus does not need any creature. But he invites a few men to stand and proclaim. To preach. To prophesy. And by his Spirit, there are those who are rightly dividing the Word and there are brothers who are faithful in their service to King Jesus. Those who sit under such men should thank their Lord and applaud those who labor well.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains that the responsibility of prioritizing preaching is on both the preacher and the congregation: "The primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God." Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 40th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 26.

<sup>13</sup> This is a biblical exhortation. In 1 Tim 5:17, the apostle Paul writes, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."

A gifted preacher is God's grace to a congregation, and his calling is to prepare the church for glory. The obedient minister cares for the bride of Christ, feeding the sheep and guarding them for the King. He is there for the congregation's benefit, and they thrive under his care. Churches who have such a servant should rejoice and praise their Savior for sending them a prized possession.

In the church, faithful men of God should be revered. Not because of anything in them, but because of their service to King Jesus and for his grace in their lives. In a day where professional athletes and politicians are celebrated as gods, the men who shepherd the bride of Christ should be applauded and presented as servants of the Most High. There is no higher calling than to feed those for whom Christ died, and local faith families should portray this perspective on a regular basis.<sup>14</sup> Congregations who are equipped by a man who preaches urgently in the light of eternity should praise God and thank their pastor.

## **Conclusion**

So then, the church must be resolved to change in light of this discussion. The world needs congregations who will let everything else fail but the preaching of the Word. The biblical principle is that the programs may die, but preaching must flourish. The modern church needs to agree and then act accordingly.

Upon reviewing the truths exposed in this thesis, the church must repent, pray, prioritize preaching, and celebrate faithful preaching. For the glory of God, the church must be unwavering in the primacy of preaching and its need in the modern day. Souls hang in the balance, and there is a desperate need for urgent preaching and men who labor with an eternal focus because of the second coming of Christ.

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<sup>14</sup> Lloyd-Jones understood the blessed opportunity it was to preach the gospel: "The work of preaching is the highest and greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called." Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching*, 14.

## **Implications for Preachers**

This thesis was written to enhance preaching around the globe. There is no greater calling than to be a herald of the gospel, and there is no greater need for humanity than to have the Word of God rightly proclaimed. Therefore, preaching must be done with excellence, for the glory of God.

The Word is to be delivered in earnest, and men are to stand and announce God's message with boldness, clarity, and unction, with a focus on the everlasting. Preaching is strongest when preachers proclaim the Word with urgency because of the second coming of Christ. This thesis exposed the poor state of many pulpits and revealed the New Testament's teaching on the second coming of Christ. By explaining the fullness of Christ's return and by magnifying its consequences for the world, the need for men to preach with urgency has been made clear.

With the weight of the situation exposed, the biblical standard for preaching clarified, and the depth of the imminence and judgment of Christ's arrival presented, this final section of the thesis is a summons. The closing pages of this work serve as a charge for men of God to fulfill their duty before their King. In the light of the second coming, while grasping all that his arrival means, preachers must pray, pursue God, prepare, and preach the Word with urgency.

### **Pray**

Paul told the church in Corinth that his preaching came "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 4:4). This description of preaching should be the goal for each minister of the gospel. Clothed with power from the Almighty, men of God should proclaim the truth of God with supernatural authority; but this only happens by his grace, through prayer.

The power of God in the preaching event cannot be manipulated and cannot be manufactured. The Lord has orchestrated all things to reveal his omnipotence and mankind's inability "so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor

1:29). Only through divine favor can a preacher leave any lasting impact, but the Father loves answering the petitions of his servants. Therefore, men must pray.

Prayer should be a lifestyle, and the pattern of a man's life should resemble one who is living *Coram Deo*, before the face of God. The preacher should be so aware of his need for grace that he regularly beseeches the Lord. He knows his frailty and is desperate for divine assistance. The biblical preacher is one who feels the gravity of his responsibility and while longing to touch eternity, places his ultimate hope in his Master. He unashamedly asks for divine favor.<sup>15</sup>

With confidence of God's love for him through Christ, the preacher can approach the throne of grace with boldness and eagerness. Believing it is God's will to use preaching for his purposes and trusting that the Lord can do anything he pleases, the preacher should ask for God "to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). Through prayer, God has ordained to move in power. As he prays, the preacher is pleading for grace and communing with his Savior.

### **Pursue God**

When the Holy Spirit converts a sinner, he takes out the corrupt heart of stone and provides a heart of flesh. He transforms the rebel and starts him on a new path to fellowship with God and equips him to live righteously. While all Christians should chase after Christ, there is a peculiar need for preachers to know God face to face.

Faithful preachers are those who are passionate about knowing God, being known by him, and making him known.<sup>16</sup> Their lives are marked by an active pursuit of

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<sup>15</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 43-54. When training young men for ministry, Spurgeon spent an entire lecture on the preacher's need for prayer: "Of course the preacher is above all others distinguished as a man of prayer. He prays as an ordinary Christian, else he were a hypocrite. He prays more than ordinary Christians, else he were disqualified for the office which he has undertaken. . . . I take it that as a minister *he is always praying*." Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding intimacy with God, Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix write, "The preacher must know intimately the Author of the message he proclaims, if his ministry is to be built on a strong foundation."

the Lord. When a man communes with God, his priorities are aligned to the Bible, and he catches a glimpse of eternity. Such an awareness revolutionizes preaching.

With a gaze on the age to come, true preachers are unwavering in their love for and pursuit of holiness.<sup>17</sup> They embody Hebrews 12:2, laying “aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and [they] run with endurance the race set before [them].” The preacher who appreciates his calling is consumed with purity, because he would rather die than fail his Lord. Holiness is the purging of all worldliness, denying vain attempts for self-promotion, and is the destruction of illegitimate motives. The holy preacher knows that one day he will be tested, and he longs to be found faithful.

This eternal focus, begotten by a lifestyle of seeking God, kills the idea of pastoral career planning. The worldly preacher plots his steps, charts his course, and schemes to accomplish his career aspirations. He will jump from role to role to climb the ladder of “success” while leaving congregations in his dust in the interim. When a man knows his Maker, his path may involve multiple pastorates, but he goes to each with a devotion to stay as long as the Lord desires.<sup>18</sup>

When a man pursues the Lord, his thinking is connected to biblical decrees. By the Spirit’s power, the preacher heralds the Bible with a focus on God. The man who is

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Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 59.

<sup>17</sup> Joel Beeke exalts the need for holiness from the man who preaches the Word: “Experiential preaching coincides with holy living. It is impossible to separate godly living from true experiential ministry. The holiness of a minister’s heart is not merely an ideal; it is absolutely necessary for his work to be effective. Holiness of life must be his consuming passion.” Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God’s Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 67.

<sup>18</sup> Erroll Hulse notices the problems with the idea of career planning when it comes to preaching. He writes, “While it is not formally instituted, as in secular realms such as banks and building societies, some denominations have a ladder. Men proceed from the smaller churches to the larger ones. A proper estimation of one’s own abilities and desire to use them is good (Rom 12:3; 1 Tim 3:1), but sheer egocentric ambition is self-worship, and damnable.” Erroll Hulse, *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 77.

intimate with his Savior does not preach man-centered messages on temporal subjects.<sup>19</sup> he does the opposite. A preacher engulfed with a passion for Christlikeness will be so focused on holy matters that his sermons will be anchored to eternity. God-centered preaching arises from a lifestyle of holiness, a knowledge of the Lord's character, and a devotion to zealously feed his people.

When a preacher fellowships with the Lord, he is enamored with the majesty of Christ and is steadfast in doing all things for his glory. Such a focus on magnifying God is evident in his preaching. Listeners are taught the purpose of creation, are aware of the preacher's goals, and hear the meaning of life. A preacher who lives and labors for God's glory is a monumental treasure.

The only hope the church has for vitality is if men of God are so bowed down under the weight of God's grandeur that they cannot shake what they have seen. They have gazed into the heavenly realm and have tasted the glory of the age to come. They have been born again by the Spirit of God, have been equipped, and have been set ablaze to give each breath for the praise of his name. They disperse an aroma of eternity and make the world aware of God's goodness and the beauty of the gospel. They proclaim that Jesus reigns, he saves, and he is coming again. This only happens when a man knows the Lord as he knows his friend. Preachers must not merely know information *about* the Savior; they must *know him*.

## **Prepare**

After being called and while actively pursuing God through prayer and a holy life, the preacher must prepare. One form of preparation is in study, particularly in studying the Bible. This is intense work, and to do it well it will cost a man his life. There

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<sup>19</sup> Clowney understands the modern tendency to focus on the listener and to minimize God in the preaching event. He gives a scathing rebuke: "Unlike the Scriptures, our sermons are so centered on men that they neglect to bless God." Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 73.

is no place for a lazy preacher.<sup>20</sup> Preparation is serious, because the truth of God’s Word is deep and can take time to learn, but there is nothing else like it.

The preacher must dwell in his study.<sup>21</sup> He is one who combs the Word of God, actively seeking to comprehend the Lord’s revelation. The Bible is his manual for service, his message to deliver, and he strives to know it well. He labors to memorize the Word—to hide God’s voice in his heart. To be faithful, he will have to have Scripture on his tongue, and long to learn all that the Lord has revealed. Because, one day, he knows that judgment is coming. He will be assessed based on the contents of the Book. What else would he spend his time doing?

Along with knowing the Bible, the preacher should study history. He must know how God has shown his might in previous days and needs to learn from the saints of old. An urgent preacher will not be enamored with modern clichés and gimmicks. Rather, he reads the men of prior eras, knowing that the Spirit has worked throughout the ages. Ancient books are dear to him, and he does not diminish those who have gone before. The faithful preacher knows history and is passionate about learning more. He should take note of those God has used throughout the centuries. Whether it is an Old Testament prophet, New Testament apostle, or a historical figure, the preacher must notice their sobriety and intensity, and model his ministry accordingly.

As he studies, another essential aspect of preparation is focusing on the right things. First, the preacher must think long on eternity. The age to come must be his focus, and he is infatuated with what lies on the horizon. He is ecstatic about the presence with

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<sup>20</sup> Lawson quotes Spurgeon as the Prince of Preachers reflected on need for intensity of preparation. Lawson writes, “Spurgeon said: ‘The ministry demands brain labor. The preacher must throw his thought into his teaching . . . an idler has no right in the pulpit. He is an instrument of Satan in damning the souls of men.’” Steven J. Lawson, *A Long Line of Godly Men Profile: The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012), 32.

<sup>21</sup> William Still, *The Work of the Pastor* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 89-92. Still explains the primacy of preaching and preparing to preach by spending time in study. In this section titled “Refusing to be Deflected,” he explains that those who let anything replace the primacy of the ministry the Word are guilty of a “dereliction of duty.” Still, *The Work of the Pastor*, 90.

his Savior and longs for the eternal state. He knows he is a sojourner on this earth, so everything he does is measured based on its worth in the new heavens and new earth. He does not waste his time, but lives for eternity. With such a lifestyle, he brings others along with him to do the same.

Second, when contemplating eternity and matters of importance, the preacher must consider the return of Christ. The parousia is the moment that will usher in eternity, and the preacher should be consumed with Jesus's return. The imminence and uncertain timing of Jesus's arrival must be at the forefront of his mind at all times. Christ's judgment for all mankind should surge in his thoughts with regularity.

The preacher knows that Jesus could return at any moment and that with his advent there will be judgment for the cosmos, and the preacher meditates on those facts. He is moved by what he sees in Scripture. The Word of God touches his soul and causes him to act. It leads him to preach, and each sermon is planned with a gaze on the age to come. The second coming of Christ and the glimpse of eternity he has seen forces him to proclaim. He has no choice. He must herald God's glorious truth to the masses.

### **Preach the Word with Urgency**

Based on this study, the ultimate implications are for the preacher. This thesis is a charge to preach the Word. The preacher must know God, commune with him, and proclaim his revelation. He must herald God's message with authority, with power, and with urgency.

Preachers have been set apart by the living God to be an ambassador. There is no greater honor, but also no higher responsibility. While preachers should be eager in this service, they should tremble before the Word and their duty. Upon grasping the divine mandate and the gravity of their role, they must preach in earnest.

Ministers must preach the Word with a "demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 4:4). They are to proclaim the Bible because Jesus is coming back, and when he does, the lost will be damned. Preachers should grieve over the terrors of hell

and should preach accordingly. Men of God must appeal to the unconverted. Unbelievers should be warned and pleaded with to come to the cross, because there will be no excuse when God's vengeance arrives.

Preachers must compel the lost to flee to the refuge of Christ. For no man knows the timing of the Lord's return, and the reality of hell is beyond terrifying. Servants of God are to urge those who mock God's grace to see this life as a vapor and to recognize their inability to do anything in their own strength. Those who minister must preach the gospel, point to Christ, and be part of his work to save sinners.

Preachers are to preach because Christians will stand and give an account of their lives. The church needs to be reminded of the eternity that awaits, and that every action will be brought to light. Preaching can equip the saints to live for the age to come, propelling the masses to seek an eternal inheritance. Preachers must remind the redeemed that they will one day stand and be judged. There should be no confusion that the judgment at the second coming is for believers and nonbelievers alike.

Preachers should herald the Word to the church and remind them that their choices matter. Messengers are to edify the beloved in the Word, giving them a glimpse of God's majesty and showing them that they are to live for his glory. The church should be urged to faithfulness and holiness. Pastors must inform congregations of the second coming and the day of judgment that awaits, where each life will be assessed by Christ.

Men should be resolved to preach the Word with a holy fury, rightly handling the Word of life. They should give their days to knowing God, making him known, and guarding his people. Because, in just a short time, each preacher's life will be analyzed, and rewards will be granted. They are to thrust off the ways of this world and chase godliness. Preachers should be pious: loving God, loving people, and fighting for holiness; serving with a clear conscience and focused on the age to come.

The preacher is an overseer of the bride of Christ. He is a steward of God's grace, has been summoned to deliver his message, and Christ will assess his work. Before

all of creation, names will be called. With his pure gaze, he will discern whether each pastor was faithful over what was entrusted to him. That may be today. Therefore, men should preach the Word with an unwavering commitment to God's glory, the good of the church, and the benefit of the nations. Preaching should be done with urgency in the light of the second coming.

This is the hour to accumulate eternal rewards and responsibilities. The Master of the universe has planned that those who labor well will be rewarded handsomely. Therefore, life should be lived in a way that magnifies that opportunity. The Lord encourages his people to live for the age to come, because he wants what is best for those he loves. The preacher should not waste one sermon, one season, or one second. Today is the day to fill a heavenly storehouse. Men must preach the Word.

With a Spirit-anointed tenacity, preachers are to announce the glory of God to the world and let every soul know that Jesus is the sovereign King. They are to provide hope to the weak-hearted, encourage the sufferer, and strengthen those facing trials. God's people need to be reminded of his omnipotence and the bliss of the age to come. Ministers can bless those under their care with the message that eternity is almost here, so hold fast. There is good news: the Savior is returning, he will rescue his beloved, and they will know the fullness of their salvation. The believer's final reward, Jesus himself, is not far off.

Heralds are to proclaim God's message when it is difficult. They are to preach when men and women scorn and when they complain. While the world considers the pulpit as something primitive, men of God must stand firm, delivering his oracles regardless the cost. No matter the response, God's servants are charged to preach the Word with urgency. They are to preach because God reigns, his Word his true, and he is worthy of being proclaimed. "And whether they hear or refuse to hear . . . they will know that a prophet has been among them" (Ezek 2:5).

The biblical preacher fears God and does not concern himself with the opinions

of carnal men. One man who God used to change history felt the same way. Larsen quotes Martin Luther, who said, “Always preach in such a way that if the people listening do not come to hate their sin, they will instead hate you.”<sup>22</sup>

Preaching is not for cowards, and it is not for those who are seeking their own interests. False teachers are applauded by the masses, and they will have no reward when Christ returns. Preachers are to take Jesus’s warning seriously: “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Preachers must make sure they are not lauded by those who have no eternal compass. Because on judgment day, such praise will not be heard. God’s servants are to live, serve, and preach for the pleasure of the Master, for he is the one who will judge every soul.

Earnest preaching avoids tricks and gimmicks. Preachers who follow the biblical prescription abhor the tactics of modern charlatans and refuse to become an entertainer. They magnify the Lord and get out of the way. The message of the cross is not about the preacher; it is focused on the triune God. Ministers are not to be clowns, because flippant preaching is an oxymoron. Preachers proclaim the Word.

Preachers are not selling goods; they are bellowing the message of the King. Real men of the Lord stand up straight, open the Word, and feed the sheep. The call of the preacher is not to manipulate but to deliver divine truth: “For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ” (2 Cor 2:17). Rather, “we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20).

As men preach with a holy urgency, they lead the church to joyful, passionate worship.<sup>23</sup> Preaching provides an opportunity for the beloved to feast on the Word, and

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<sup>22</sup> Larsen, *The Company of Preachers*, 1:157.

<sup>23</sup> The reaction of God’s people to hearing the Word proclaimed should imitate what the disciples felt on the road to Emmaus. Luke records the disciples’ emotions after hearing Jesus teach. Referring to the disciples, Luke writes, “They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened the Scriptures?’” (24:32).

when they do so, they are beholding the living God. The preacher presents God to the people in all his glory, and listeners are led to intimacy with him. When the Lord is seen and beheld, the church is transformed and explodes in praise and mission.

Preachers are to expose the gospel in such a way that people are captivated by its beauty. Faithful preaching helps people to see God as all-satisfying, all-glorious, and beyond spectacular. True preachers present a lofty view of the Almighty. When congregants understand these truths, they long to know him and serve him.

Under faithful preaching, listeners are moved to reverence, stillness, and sobriety. Congregants are in awe of their God. Preachers are to preach so that men and women are subdued under the weight of God's glory. There should be a gravity in the pulpit, clarifying that the matters being discussed are of infinite value. True preaching reminds listeners of the loveliness of Christ, the worth of their souls, and how precious eternity will be.

The pulpit is not relaxing. It is not a center for light-hearted discussion or conversation. It is not the place for a lecture. The sacred desk from which God's truth is proclaimed is not to be civilized. Larsen states, "The pulpit is an awful place; we preach for eternity."<sup>24</sup> This is an arena for men who live in the light of eternity, and those who answer the call must be prepared to be considered strange in the culture in which they live. They may be viewed as odd by the watching world, but they are consumed with their Father's approval, not the world's.<sup>25</sup> Preaching is to be so engulfed with the pleasantries of heaven and the horrors of hell that all in attendance are struck by what is being shared.

In preaching with urgency because of the second coming, men are to preach

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<sup>24</sup> Larsen, *The Company of Preachers*, 1:157. Larsen records a note written by the eighteenth-century Baptist preacher, Andrew Fuller.

<sup>25</sup> The Gospels describe John the Baptist as one who lived in the wilderness and "wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey" (Matt 3:4). This is a picture of a man obsessed with God and quite peculiar in his era, but he was a preacher of the highest caliber.

for change. They preach to make men and women act. They preach for transformation. Faithful expositors proclaim the Word to awaken a generation—they long to see revival. They labor to leave a legacy, not for themselves but so that all of history will know that Jesus was proclaimed. God was magnified; the world was touched by the divine. Preachers must preach the Word.

While the summons to preach is weighty, and few men qualify, there is no greater mission on the planet. Preachers speak on behalf of the living God, and each one has been chosen as a messenger. The preacher is equipped with the infallibility of the Scriptures and is girded with the presence of the Spirit. God lives, and Christ has come to make a way for sinners. Jesus reigns, and he is coming back to rescue, to judge, and to damn. Eternity awaits, and what is done on earth has consequences. Therefore, under the authority of God and in the power of the Spirit, men are beckoned to preach the Word with a fiery passion, accompanied by an overwhelming focus on eternity.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has argued that there is a great need for urgency in the pulpit. It has shown that the church desperately needs men of God who are consumed with eternity. God's people and the nations long for preachers to preach in earnest, and motivation for doing so comes from an awareness of the New Testament's teaching on the second coming of Christ.

So then, where are the men? Where are those who are resolved to preach the Word with urgency? For the glory of God, the conversion of the lost, and the hope of the church, those who are called by God must preach the Word. The day of judgment awaits. The church is hungry, and the world is needy. With a gaze on eternity and in the light of the second coming of Christ, preachers are to preach the Word with urgency.

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## ABSTRACT

### PREACHING WITH URGENCY: HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT'S TEACHING ON THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST NECESSITATES EARNEST PROCLAMATION

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By studying the New Testament's teaching on the second coming of Christ, this thesis demonstrates that preachers should preach with urgency because of the imminence of Christ's return. The second coming of Christ is motivation to preach with urgency due to its warning of judgment to the unconverted and the offer of comfort and eternal reward to the Christ-follower.

The first chapter addresses introductory material, revealing the need for urgent preaching in the modern era and the lack of literature on the subject. Chapter 2 describes the New Testament's teaching on the imminence of the second advent, and why this is relevant to preaching with urgency. Chapter 3 explains what is to occur at the parousia, detailing the judgment for all humanity, the eternal repercussions that follow, and how this correlates to preaching in earnest. Chapter 4 connects preaching with the return of Jesus by analyzing the apostle Paul's words in 2 Timothy 4. Finally, chapter 5 addresses the implications for the church, explaining the need for all preachers to preach with urgency and includes a summons to do so.

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