

Revelation 1:7-8 *“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen. ⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

I want you to think for a moment about how happy you feel when you are looking forward to an event. The kids don't have to think too hard about this. I know they are all excited about Christmas coming. The gifts underneath the tree are starting to get to them as they wonder and dream about what might be wrapped for them. Maybe you too are anticipating the Christmas celebration and have that happy feeling inside of you. Maybe it's a movie you're looking forward to seeing or a celebration that you're excited about or even the opportunity to start a new book that you've heard so much about but haven't had the chance to read yet. Research has shown that anticipating something can be a powerful, positive influence on us that will help us to live happier lives. We tend to experience more intense emotions about future events than those of the past. In addition, we are also more likely to talk about how excited we are about something we have planned compared to something we have already done. It can be a big influence in our lives to think about the enjoyment we are going to have.

Do you live in anticipation of Christ's return? The theological word which describes the study of the end times and Christ's return to this earth is eschatology. Does your typical day have an eschatological focus? Do you on a daily basis look forward to the coming of Christ with joyful anticipation of what that day will bring? I would guess that most of us go through our lives each and every day without much of thought about Christ returning to this earth. When we are preparing for a vacation or a special holiday or celebration that is on our mind constantly. We let the joy we have as we anticipate this event help us slug through the tough times. We let the anticipation guide our actions as we make sure we get everything done and are all set and ready to go. But Jesus' return is not something that is readily on our minds. That's why we think it is important to have seasons in the church year like End Times and Advent so that we bring before ourselves regularly the certainty of Christ's return and the blessings Christ will bring to us when he comes. Keeping our minds focused on the certain return of Christ and the tremendous blessings he brings will then influence and affect the lives that we live as we wait for his return. The joy of the blessings that will be ours keep us waiting in anticipation and affect not only our outlook on life, but also on the priorities we have in life and the activities we engage in in life.

As John lived in exile on the island of Patmos, he longed for Christ's return. John had lived a long life in this broken world filled with sin. He had seen or heard of all the other apostles martyred for their proclamation of God's Word and service to his people. He had seen how cruelly the Jewish leaders and Romans had treated his Savior when they crucified him. He experienced that same treatment in being exiled to live out his life on this deserted island for proclaiming God's word. He had watched Christians being fed to the lions in the colosseum and others with burning with tar over them because they wouldn't deny their Savior. He knew the hardships of life. Looking back on the past didn't bring him a whole lot of joy.

But looking forward did. John had something to look forward to—the return of his Savior. God even granted him a glimpse of his Savior returning. John shares that glimpse in our text: *“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”* Not only had Jesus promised this but God was now giving him additional certainty by allowing him a glimpse. Jesus was coming back to this earth to rescue his people and deliver them once and for all from sin. When Jesus comes, God's people will be freed from this broken, sinful world to live in the joy and bliss of heaven. Talk about something to look forward to! This is the ultimate in events to look forward to! While we look forward to a celebration or event or even vacation, we know that it will last only for a short time. Often, then the anticipation might be even better than the reality. The waiting and looking forward can be more exciting and enjoyable than the event itself. Part of that is because that event will eventually end. No matter how great the wedding service and dance, no matter how exciting the big game, no matter how relaxing the vacation, they will come to an end. Not so when Jesus comes again. What he has waiting for his people will be perfect bliss which will last forever. No matter how big our excitement, it can't possibly match the eternal and perfect joy God's people will experience in heaven. That anticipation for Christ's return influenced John. He could look passed the troubles and hardships with joy for what was to come. He could take his eyes off of his current situation and be filled with hope and elation because he looked forward to what God had waiting for him. He lived in anticipation of Christ's return and that affected and influenced the life he lived here.

So too with us. We live in anticipation of Christ's return. With John, we know how Jesus rescued us from sin in his first coming and look forward to enjoy the fullness of that deliverance when he comes again. We rejoice with Paul that no matter how hard the sufferings and trials are here they can't even possibly compare to the joys that we will have in heaven when Christ returns. With John, we long for the time our trials and troubles here on this earth will be gone and passed and we will be in the eternal bliss of God's presence in heaven. We aren't just looking forward to an annual holiday celebration or even a special one-time event that we can check off of our bucket list. We are looking forward to the blessings of eternity with Jesus which will never end and will be ours forever. We live in anticipation of Christ's return.

When you live in anticipation of Christ's return, that changes the way that you live. Living in anticipation that our Lord and Savior could return at any time has a huge influence on how we live our lives and how we spend the time which God has given to us here on this earth. Think of the joy and certainty that are ours when we spend each day living in anticipation of Christ's return. We don't have to be anxious or worry about bad news or difficult situations. No matter what happens here on this earth, we take our comfort in knowing that we have eternal life waiting for us. We can face whatever challenge or situation which confronts us knowing our God reigns, will use all things for our good and has heaven waiting for us. Living in anticipation of Christ's return has a huge impact on us.

As we live in anticipation of Christ's return, we will also more and more redirect our priorities to be less self-focused and more Kingdom-focused. Why would we pile up resources to use for our own pleasure and temporal joys when the world needs to know the true joy of Jesus Christ? Longing for the return of Christ doesn't mean that we don't take vacations or use our resources for ourselves but it does keep us from wasting our resources without any care for the lost world that is perishing around us.

Anticipating Christ's return also influences the simple conversations we have on a daily basis. What about that person you talked with at the mall this week? What about the Uber driver that you talked with last week? How about the person you sat next to on the plane? What about the person in the coffee shop who engaged in small talk as you waited for your Frappuccino to be served? The God who rules the universe also directs the steps of all of us. There are no "chance" conversations that we have in a single day. If we anticipate the return of Jesus, it will change how we look at such conversations, friendships, family connections and work relationships. Living in anticipation of Christ's return causes us to look at people through an eschatological lens and our conversations will suddenly have a much deeper purpose. That doesn't mean we look at people as projects or notches in our evangelistic belts, but a proper anticipation of Jesus' return will cause us to engage in disciple making at a much deeper level.

Anticipating Christ's return will also lead us to pay attention to our lifestyles. The choices we make on a daily basis are testimonials to those who don't believe. How we live and what we do will speak volumes to them about what is important to us, what we are looking forward to and what Jesus is really like. Regardless of when Christ returns, we want to follow his will for our lives. That means we spend time each day in God's Word being strengthened by his promises and encouraged as we wait for his return. We look for ways in which we can serve the Lord. That means that even though you may be retired from full time employment, we never retire working for God. That means looking at your gifts and deciding how you can use them to serve God and others. You might not be able to sing in the choir or teach a Bible Class, but you can serve by helping with the property and grounds, making coffee, helping with Sunday School or in any other number of ways. Living in anticipation of Christ's return leads us to work diligently in the time God has given us here to carry out his mission of reaching the lost of our world.

I asked you earlier, "Do you live in anticipation of Christ's return?" Does your typical day have an eschatological focus? Perhaps as we have talked today, your conscience has been pricked and you have had to answer, "No, I don't always live with an eschatological focus in anticipation of Christ's return." If we are honest with ourselves, we would admit that much of our lives are lived in pursuit of selfish ambitions and desires. We can look at ourselves in the mirror of God's law and confess that our thoughts are more often on ourselves than on our Savior and his return. We would admit that our focus is more on the mission of self than on the mission of Christ. This knowledge doesn't give us much joy as we ponder the return of our Savior. It leaves us full of fear and dread at the punishment we deserve. This is when we find joy in looking back to the past. Christ has come once into this world. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Your sin is covered in his blood and paid in full before almighty God. You don't have to live in fearful apprehension about standing before your Savior because he has cleansed you of your sin and promised you life in heaven. Because of what he did for you in the past, you can look forward in joy, despite your sin, to the heaven that awaits because of God's grace and love.

Live in anticipation of Christ's return. I know the kids are all excited about Christmas. And maybe you are too. And that's well and fine. We have a joyous celebration of Christ's first coming to look forward to in just a few weeks. But don't let that be your only focus. While looking back on Christ's first coming brings joy and gladness, looking ahead to his second coming brings blessings beyond our wildest imaginations. As John proclaims: Christ is coming again. Every eye will see him. We will stand before him in joy covered in the righteousness of Christ and we will live with him forever. Let that be your focus each and every day. Let that give you strength and lift you up through life's troubles. Let that give you joy no matter what you face. Let that influence and affect your life and its priorities. Live in anticipation of Christ's return. Amen.