

LIVING IN LIGHT OF OUR BLESSED HOPE
Titus 2:13

INTRO: We considered in the last message the context of Titus 2:13 which says, "...looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." We saw that the foregoing context deals with right living. Older men, younger men, older women and younger women, and servants are instructed on godly living. Paul says the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. And this grace teaches us that we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age.

We also saw that in the following context, in verse 14, that the conduct of our lives is in view. Jesus gave Himself for us that we might be redeemed from every lawless deed, and that He might purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Godly living is in view in the context.

I mentioned that it may be that the words, "...looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." may connect to the verb 'has appeared' and if so, then eagerly looking for the appearing of Christ is a matter that will greatly encourage us to godly living. 1 John 3:3 says that every man that has this hope in himself purifies himself just as Jesus is pure. The hope is that when Jesus appears we will be like Him.

So, with that we want to look now at our text which is verse 13 (read).

II. THE CONTENT OF OUR TEXT

A. Important Doctrine In The Blessed Hope

Now before we get into the theme of prophecy and the explanations of the blessed hope, let me mention something here about the doctrine of the Trinity. The text says, "...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Here we have a very clear passage that teaches us that Jesus is divine. Jesus, according to this passage, is our great God and He is the Savior. It is not a teaching in Scripture that God the Father will appear for us. It is Jesus that will come again, as the NT so clearly teaches. So I just wanted to

make that point as the doctrine of the Trinity is very important to Christian doctrine.

B. Explanation Of The Blessed Hope

So we pass from that to give an explanation of the phrase, 'the blessed hope.' But before I do that, let me mention here that the word 'looking' means to expect; to wait for, or to wait eagerly for. One does not eagerly wait for something one does not expect. I ask you, do you eagerly expect the appearing of Jesus Christ at any moment? This is important to godliness.

Now, it is not just our hope we are talking about here. It is our *blessed* hope. That is important. To understand that we need to understand the term 'rapture' for the rapture is our blessed hope. For those who attend this church, the subject of the **rapture** is nothing new. To be a Christian and not have a handle on prophecy to some degree leaves a very important window of the Scriptures closed. And for those who are not familiar with prophecy, the term 'rapture' is sometimes a stumbling block. They say, "The word rapture is not found in the Bible. It is not biblical." Well, actually, it is in the Bible, but not our English Bibles. It is a term that comes from the Latin Bible.

So, to explain the phrase, the blessed hope, let me take you to the terms the Bible does use. Our passage is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (read). Now notice in verse 17 the words, 'shall be caught up.' That is the phrase that is translated 'rapere' in the Latin Bible, and that we have come to know as 'rapture'. It simply means 'to be caught up.' The original word is 'harpazo' of which we will not take much time because of the purpose of our message. But, what we have clearly in this passage is that living believers are going to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and they will go to be with Christ. There is no escaping this simple meaning here. And that is our hope. So the rapture, the catching up of the Church, is our hope.

C. Timing Of The Blessed Hope

So we move on to another important subject, and that is the timing of the blessed hope. Now let me say this to you this morning. Unless you are a very new Christian you should be somewhat familiar with Bible prophecy. When I speak of the timing of the blessed hope, you need to understand Bible prophecy. So this morning I will give you a crash course.

You see, people say, "Bible prophecy has so many different views or opinions and is so very difficult, that I just feel it is out of my range and the best thing for me is to be ready at all times." But it is Bible prophecy that is one of the greatest encouragements to godly living and to be ready at all times. If one believes like Brian McLaren, that the world will go on like it is for hundreds of thousands of years, one's whole focus on life changes. And certainly one does not have the blessed hope of expecting Christ at any moment.

So, for those for whom this is new, let me simplify Bible prophecy for you. There are basically three views. So that makes things simple. All you have to do is go to Revelation 20. Read verses 1-9, where you will find the phrase 'a thousand years' in verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. That is a total of six times. Now all you need to do is determine if that means what it says or not. If you think one thousand years means one thousand years, then you are a premillennialist which is one of the three major views of Bible prophecy.

Now let me explain what a premillennialist is. He holds to a literal view of Bible interpretation and thus he believes there is a time period coming when Christ will rule on earth for one thousand years, just as this text says. You see, one's system of Bible interpretation determines what view one holds on Bible prophecy.

So, maybe you say, "I'm not sure that one thousand years means one thousand years." Well, then you are either an amillennialist or a post millennialist. An amillennialist says there will be no literal one thousand year reign of Christ. The book of Revelation and such literature is not to be taken literally. Now it should not be hard to see that such teaching is

wrong. If the prophecies to Christ's first coming were literal, how would prophecies to His second coming not be literal?

Last is the postmillennial view. It does not really view these thousand years as a thousand years. This view thinks we will make this world better and better until it is so good, Christ will be able to come back. That is kind of the view being adopted all over the Christian world now. It is called things like 'kingdom now' theology. If you have any bit of Bible sense, you can very easily see that this is not correct.

So one is left with only one view, the premillennial view. But in the premillennial view, there are three other views. Now, you see, in Bible prophecy, before the millennium begins, there is a tribulation time of seven years. And these other three views are related to the tribulation. One view says Christ comes before the beginning of the tribulation. The second says He comes in the middle, and the third says Christ comes at the end of the tribulation. Now, sorting these out, becomes more difficult and I cover all that in the prophecy series that is available on sermon audio.

But, right here on this very subject, I think, the word 'blessed' helps us out. So let us consider this word 'blessed' for its meaning. If I were to give a literal rendering of the word blessed, which is the word 'makarios', I would translate it like this: To be envied is the man that has this hope. Here is the picture. Just shortly before us lies the time known as Daniel's 70th week, or the time of Jacob's trouble; or the tribulation time; or the wrath of God. It is an indescribably horrible time. Just read Revelation chapters 6-19 and you will see how bad it will be. But the Lord has promised that He will keep the Church from that hour. He will catch the Church up to be with Him. Is that a blessed hope? Is a person which such a hope, a person to be envied? Very much so!

Look at it this way. Let us say that the Bible teaches Christ will come in the middle of the tribulation, or after the middle but before the great wrath of God is poured out, or at the end of the tribulation. Now we do not wait for Christ, we wait for antichrist. And then we can fully expect to die for the faith in martyrdom, and our children will deny Christ or die as well. I ask you, if you expected that the tribulation is right around the corner, and almost all Christians will be martyred before Christ returns for the Church, would you look forward to His coming? I ask, is this a blessed hope then?

But, let me give you another picture now. Let us say that the tribulation is right around the corner. But, even closer than that is the great 'catching up'. So you know that before the tribulation happens, Christ will come and catch the Church up to heaven and thus we would ever be with Him. I ask, is that a 'blessed' hope? Yes, that is a blessed hope!

Let me give you another reason why this hope is a blessed hope. The Church is caught up to heaven and her relationship to Jesus Christ is pictured as the relationship of marriage. The Church is now the bride of Christ but she will then be the wife of Christ. And for those seven tribulation years on earth, the Church will be enjoying the bliss of heaven with Christ. It is this that Christ spoke of in John 14. Turn to it (read 1-3). Is that a blessed hope?

So, now go with me to Revelation 19 (read 6-9). In Revelation 19, we have come to the end of the tribulation time. The Church is in heaven. She has been there for seven years, just as the Jewish wedding was often celebrated for seven days. This is what makes the hope of Christ's soon return 'blessed'. To be envied is the man that has this hope!

D. The Nearness Of Our Blessed Hope

Now we ask, how near is this blessed hope? How near are we to the time when the Lord will take the Church home? Does the Bible give any indication of what it will be like before Jesus returns? Well, the Bible

tells us what it will be like just before the tribulation begins. And if the catching up is just before Christ returns we can get some idea of what it will be like.

So, go to Matthew 24 (read 1-3). The disciples asked three questions related to Jesus' prophecies of the future. I don't have time to explain it all here. But as I see it, Jesus answers the first question, 'When will these things be?', in verses 4-31. Then the second question: 'What will be the sign of Your coming' I see as a question regarding the catching up. And He answers that in 24:32-25:30. And the third question, 'What will be the sign of the end of the age, as I see it, He answers in 25:31-46.

Now I want you to notice something very carefully. Look at the word 'see' in verse 33 in the clause, 'when you see all these things.' The verb 'to see' is in the Greek aorist tense. Normally it is translated as the past tense but it signifies other things as well. It can indicate the beginning of an action and is quite often used like that. The parallel passage in Mark 13:29 gives the very same tense, indicating when you see these things begin to come to pass then you know Jesus' return is near. But in Luke's parallel account of 21:28 he uses the very words that the aorist tense here indicates. He says, "...when these things begin to happen..."

So we ask, when what things begin to happen? Well, all the things Jesus had told them were going to happen in 24:4-28. And I ask you, how does this list begin? Well, look at 24:4-8 (read). Then notice verses 9 (read). Now verses 4-8 are the beginning of sorrows. But verse 6 says the end is not yet.

We begin then at verses 4-5 (read). I ask you, are we there? Do we see these things happening? Then our blessed hope says that Jesus is coming soon! These things have begun to come to pass. Much of what I will say now will be from a message I did a number of years ago.

The first sign that the return of Christ is near is that of an ever increasing unrest in religion. Today there is an ever increasing infatuation of claims by

people that they are Christ. Why not claim to be Mohammed or some other great religious figure? Because there is no fear that either Mohammed or any other great religious figure will return to rule this world!

I do not have access to figures of those who have claimed to be Christ over the years but it is very obvious that an increase is taking place. If I remember correctly Billy Graham made the comment a number of years ago that in California alone there were over 200 people who claimed to be Christ. Probably not too many years before that there were not 200 people in the whole world who claimed to be Christ!

Grant Jeffrey writes, "As we approach the year 2000 the world is desperately looking for a Messiah-figure to solve its huge and growing problems. The Buddhists and the Hindus are searching for the next Avatar. The Moslems are expecting the appearance of the Mahdi, a messiah-like figure mentioned by the Koran, to usher in the last days. In Israel today, there is a rising expectation of the coming Messiah. Banners in Jerusalem proclaim, 'We want Messiah now!'" (Apocalypse 109). Here is our first sign that His coming is very near. Jesus said that when you see these things BEGIN to come to pass you know it is near even at the doors.

The second sign Jesus mentions that shows His coming is near is an increasing unrest among the nations (read verse 6-7a). One can seldom if ever listen to a thorough coverage of news without some war being fought or some new war beginning. There is already, deep within the hearts of many, a great desire for peace. Today we are ready to pay almost any price for peace. When Israel trades land for peace you know their hearts have reached breaking point in their longing for peace. It is no wonder they cry, "We want Messiah now!"

So while the world rushes headlong towards the false peace of the false Messiah you and I need to lift up our heads for our redemption draweth nigh. Almost every news broadcast of war is a reminder that Christ's coming is near. When all these things BEGIN

to come to pass you know it is near even at the doors. Has this sign begun to come to pass?

Jesus gives yet a third sign that His coming is near, and it is an ever increasing unrest in nature (7b). Do we see that today? Without question. The first of these indicators in nature that His coming is near is famine. Hunger! That which you and I know nothing of is the cause of death to multiplied thousands in our world. Not only is there unrest in man's religious world or in his political world, nature itself is indicating that something new is near. The earth itself is preparing for something. Have we seen a sign of an increase in famines yet? Without doubt. What is the message? Christ will soon return.

The second sign in nature is pestilences. The Greek word translated pestilences is *loimoi* and speaks of any infectious deadly malady. With the discovery of penicillin and the refining of its use for medical purposes man said the end of infectious maladies was in sight. We had entered an era called the Golden age of chemotherapy (Ency. Brit. 1:986). Who had dreamed that 30 years later, 1978, the first 100% fatal disease called the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or AIDS, would be introduced into this world. I understand that it is possible that in some parts of Africa every person will die of aids. Today we have Ebola and different strains of it.

I want to ask you again. Are you ready? Jesus is coming soon. Our blessed hope is near. The signs tell us so. The increase in false Christs, the increase in wars, the increase in famine, the increase in pestilences tells us it is so. Nature itself is crying out, "Jesus is coming soon." When you see all these things **begin** to come to pass then you know He will be here soon.

The final phenomena in man's world given us as a sign by Christ that tells us His coming is very near is the phenomena of earthquakes in various places. I have read that until the year 1900 the world averaged about one killer quake every 10 years. Then about the time man discovered penicillin and thought he could see the end of deadly maladies, and about the time

Israel became a nation, earthquakes began to increase significantly.

I have the following figures from Grant R. Jeffrey in his book, "Apocalypse: The Coming Judgment of the Nations":

1900 approx. 1 every decade

1950-59 recorded 9 killer quakes

1960-69 recorded 13

1970-79 recorded 56

1980-89 recorded 74 killer quakes

At the time I read that, it was estimated that at the present rate of increase that the years from 1990-99 would record 125 killer quakes.

I understand that the earth tremors all over the place almost constantly. You see, even the rocks are crying out, "Jesus is coming soon." The increase in false Christs, the increase in war, the increase in famines, the increase in pestilences and the increase in earthquakes all are sending a very strong and clear message. Do we get the message?

Now that is what it will be like on earth just before the tribulation. And we are seeing these things. So how near to Christ's return are we? Near! But what will it be like among mankind just before Christ returns? Well, look at Matthew 24 again (read 36-39). What will it be like among mankind, though there are wars and earthquakes and famines etc...? Well, it will be like it was in the days of Noah. They were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage. You see, there is nothing wrong with those things. It is wrong if you don't marry etc... But the point is that life, in the days of Noah went on as usual right up until it rained. What will it be like when Christ returns? It will be life as usual. Just like it is right now.

And then, all of a sudden it will be like verses 40-41 (read). I understand that many pre-tribulational teachers do not view this passage as referring to the rapture. I think a word study of the words 'taken' and 'left' require this to speak of the great catching up of the Church. I give my reasons in the prophecy series available on sermonaudio.com/lhec.

CONCL: And so, in conclusion, from all of this, how should we then live? Well, look at Matthew 24:42 (read). Watch! And what are we to watch? Our own spiritual condition! Be ready. Christ might come today! You see, in Titus 2, if the phrase 'looking for the blessed hope' belongs grammatically to the verb of the clause that we should live soberly, righteously and godly, that then indicates how important it is that we have this doctrine of the blessed hope in order in our lives.

As we consider the nearness of the Lord's return, in closing I want to give you a true story that I have given you before but I think you will find it helpful again. It is the story of the eruption of Mount Saint Helens as found in Billy Graham's book, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. It goes like this:

Mt. Saint Helens belched gray steam plumes hundreds of feet into the blue Washington sky. Geologists watched their seismographs in growing wonder as the earth danced beneath their feet. Rangers and state police, sirens blaring, herded tourists and residents from an ever-widening zone of danger. Every piece of scientific evidence being collected in the laboratories and on the field predicted the volcano would soon explode with a fury that would leave the forests flattened. "Warning!" blared the loudspeakers on patrol cars and helicopters hovering overhead. "Warning!" blinked battery-powered signs at every major cross-road. "Warning!" pleaded radio and television announcers, shortwave and citizens-band operators. "Warning!" echoed up and down the mountain; and lakeside villages, tourist camps and hiking trails emptied as people heard the warning and fled for their lives.

But Harry Truman refused to budge. Harry was the caretaker of a recreation lodge on Spirit Lake, five miles north of Mt. Saint Helens smoke-enshrouded peak. The rangers warned Harry of the coming blast. Neighbors begged him to join them in their exodus. Even Harry's sister called to talk sense into the old man's head. But Harry ignored the warnings. From the picture-postcard beauty of his lakeside home reflecting the snow-capped peak overhead, Harry grinned on national television and said, "Nobody knows more about this mountain than Harry and it dare not blow up on him..."

On 18 May 1980, as the boiling gases beneath the mountains surface bulged and buckled the landscape to its final limits, Harry Truman cooked his eggs and bacon, fed his sixteen cats the scraps, and began to plant petunias round the border of his freshly mowed lawn. At 8:31 A.M. the mountain exploded.

Did Harry regret his decision in that millisecond he had before the concussive waves, traveling faster than the speed of sound, flattened him and everything else for 150 square miles? Did he have time to mourn his stubbornness as millions of tons of rock disintegrated and disappeared into a cloud reaching ten miles into the sky? Did he struggle against the wall of mud and ash fifty feet high that buried his cabin, his cats and his freshly mowed lawn - or had he been vaporized (like 100,000 people at Hiroshima) when the mountain erupted with a force 500 times greater than the nuclear bomb which leveled that Japanese city?

Now Harry is a legend in the corner of Washington where he refused to listen. He smiles down on us from posters and T-shirts and beer mugs. Balladeers sing a song about old Harry, the stubborn man who put his ear to the mountain but would not heed the warnings" end quote.

We have put our ear to the Scripture this morning. Warning, says the increase in false Christs. Warning, calls the increase in wars. Warning, cries the increase in famines. Warning blaers the increase in AIDS epidemics etc... Warning Screams the fast increase in earthquakes.

With all those warnings, millions will not be looking for that blessed hope. They will enter a time in which multiplied millions will die and go to a Christ-less grave.

If You are not saved, today is the day! If you are a Christian and are afraid to face Jesus Christ today is the time to get right with God. It is our sin we must deal with if we want to be ready for our blessed hope. We take care of our sins by repenting. And then we must put our trust in Christ for our salvation.