

His Appearing and Kingdom

Series on 2 Timothy

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 4

Preached on: Sunday, June 2, 2013

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Let's take our Bibles together and turn to 2 Timothy 4. As we read that earlier, you will notice that it begins with a solemn charge by the Apostle Paul to Timothy. This is Paul's last will and testament in many senses. It's the very last bit of literature we have from his hand. I think Paul is conscious that what he says he says at the very tail end of his life. He knows that shortly he will die. He tells us that in verse 8, "the time of my departure has come." He sees no way to avoid that. The burden of leadership will now fall on others shoulders including Timothy and so Paul issues a charge. He abjures Timothy to do what? Well, he abjures him, he issues a charge to Timothy to preach the word. To preach the word. We are not going to look at that this morning particularly as we won't get that far but that's what Paul is doing. He sees the whole ministry of the church, the future of the church stretching out before him. Now that the apostles are dying, what is the future? The future is the proclamation of the word. He has already discussed with us what that word includes. It includes the teaching of the apostles, chapter 3, verse 10. It includes the sacred writings, the Hebrew Scriptures. So the teaching of the apostles and the sacred writings together become all Scripture, verse 16 of chapter 3. Breathed out by God. The very breath of God, profitable for teaching and reproof and correction and training in righteousness. Paul is going to say to Timothy, "Preach that word. Preach it. All Scripture. Proclaim it to others."

But before he gets to the command, I want you to notice the context of that command. It's very easy to glide over those words and to think that we understand them and know them but I want you to know that when he writes to Timothy, Timothy he has already told us has been familiar with both the Pauline teaching and with the Hebrew Scriptures and that the language he uses now as he introduces the charge to Timothy is solemn because the language is fully loaded, truly awesome language. It describes fully loaded, truly awesome realities of presence and judgment and appearing and kingdom.

What does he mean by those 4 words? Let's look at that together. First of all, the presence. "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus." He's putting God and Christ Jesus together in the one breath. God and Christ Jesus belong together. This is consistent with the New Testament testimony that God is 1 in 3 and 3 in 1, that Christ is God, God and Christ Jesus. And he talks about the presence of God and Christ Jesus. It has a sense in which God is everywhere present. You can't escape from God. You can't

ever get out of God's presence. Sometimes we talk about worshiping God, don't we, in nature. We go out into a beautiful countryside and we think we feel near to God in the countryside. This past week, I went to a conference and was speaking there in Elizabethtown which is in Pennsylvania somewhere. I honestly thought that Pennsylvania ended at the King of Prussia Mall. It certainly ends there from the normally because I like to go there and shop but I thought that was nothing beyond that. I mean, who needs anything beyond King of Prussia? So it was an eye opener to me to get beyond there and to discover that actually there is some really nice scenery in Pennsylvania, that it's very pretty at points. It was great to get out very early in the morning and go out for walks on the grounds of the college where this conference was and to hear the birds singing and to look at the beautiful trees and the scenery and to feel close to God. Well, in this sense, I did feel close to God. I was praying for some things that were on my mind and I was meditating on what I was going to be preaching on that day and I enjoyed seeing the creation of God. What a beautiful creation it is.

So God is everywhere. You may not be a Christian and you're sitting in this room, let me tell you there is nowhere you've been this week that God hasn't been. Then we live and move and have our being. If I take a ship and I go to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there, "Even there you are with me," writes the psalmist. God is generally present anywhere but when Paul writes here about the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, he is thinking of something far more particular than the general presence of God. At least I think he is. I think he understands that Timothy will immediately realize that he's talking about where God is personally present, where God is, we would say, covenantally present, that is, present with his people, especially where he is with his people. God was with the children of Israel when they were in slavery in Egypt but he was very specially present with his people when they gathered, when they assembled together around Mount Sinai and he came down and he met with them there.

Where does God come down? Where is God specially, personally, covenantally present with his own people? When you rewind the story, go right back to the garden of Eden. The garden of Eden which is the very first sacred space that God ever created where he could meet with his own people. We're told about God that he walked in the garden. That he approached his children there. That he met with them there. That he spoke with them there in the garden and in that sacred space they had a one-on-one relationship with the God who had made them. That becomes the model for every other kind of similar situation that you discover in the Bible. So for example, when God ordains or commands that they should have a tabernacle, we read about this in Leviticus 26, God says this, "I will make my tabernacle among you. I will walk among you just like I did with Adam and Eve in the Garden in that sacred space. When you build a tabernacle, I will come and I will walk with you. I will walk among you there in the tabernacle." Or listen to these words from 2 Samuel 7:6 where God says, "I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about," literally walking about, "in a tent for my dwelling."

In the tent, you remember, there is the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies is the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant is God's footstool. It's the place where God

touches down, as it were. Here is the invisible God who is everywhere. He is omnipresent but he is specially present. He touches down, he meets with his people and he meets with them specially in the tabernacle and later in the temple. What is special about the temple, Eden and the tabernacle is that there is the place where God is especially present with his people. One of the ways this was signified in the Scripture, of course, is that God led the children of Israel, you remember, with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and that when they built the tabernacle, that pillar of cloud, that pillar of fire stood over the Holy of Holies. It was an indicator to children of Israel. It was saying to them, "God is with you. The one and only God. Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one." This God is a living God. He is among his people, his Israel. He is in their midst. He is present with them. Wherever they go, wherever they journey, he is there. When they take down stakes and they move on, he goes before them. Wherever they camp, he is there in the midst of them. He is present. When they moved into their promised land and he ordains it Jerusalem, Zion, Mount Zion should become the center of Israel. They build their temple there and Solomon dedicates the temple, you will remember, the same glory cloud, the same pillar of fire by night and pillar of cloud by day came and was suspended above the Holy of Holies in the temple. It was saying to anybody who cared visit Israel that the God of Israel Israel. He is present in the midst of his people. In fact, the land as well as Jerusalem became known as the place where God lives. God lives, God dwells, God meets with people, God is present especially in Israel in the land, in the city, Zion, Jerusalem. In the temple, especially in the Holy of Holies.

It was the great commission of Adam and later the great commission of Israel to extend the sacred space of the temple, the place where God was present until it filled the whole earth and people were in the presence of God personally, covenantally. That was one of the great goals and the great end of history. We go to the book of Revelation and you read that in the new heavens and the new earth, the great feature of that is that the whole earth is the temple, that God is present everywhere. The nations are there with him. He is there personally, covenantally. We read this in Revelation 21 when John the apostle is shown the city and the land and the temple and they all merge into one thing. He says this, "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb." The Lord Almighty and the Lamb, they are there personally, present ultimately in the temple, in the temple earth, the temple city, new Jerusalem, Zion, city of our God.

Now, if that is the ultimate goal, the presence of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, Paul is able to write to Timothy and say, "The presence of God and the Lamb, Christ Jesus, is already experienced by the people of God today. He is personally, covenantally present with his people today." How had Timothy experienced that? We know from the letters Paul has written that Timothy had been set apart to be a preacher of the Gospel. He had been set apart by the laying on of hands in the assembly of God's people. Paul has reminded him of that. Paul has reminded him that God was present when he was set apart to be a minister of the Gospel because the people of God were gathered at that time.

You know this Hebrew idea of the glory cloud, the Shekinah glory of God, is reproduced in our New Testament Scriptures. It's the day of Pentecost. Jesus has been raised from the

dead. The ascension has taken place. He has ascended to the Father's right hand. He has taken the throne of David as Peter proclaims. He is the King of Israel. And on the day of Pentecost, that which was promised in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, falls on the people as they are gathered in the temple, those believers who had gathered in the temple and were worshipping and were waiting there. As they are gathered and waiting there, there is almost a reproduction of that thing that had happened in Solomon's day as the glory falls and as the glory, like a tongue of fire, descends not on the Holy of Holies now but on the heads of each believer as they are gathered there signaling a shift in the history of redemption, in the history of salvation. The place of true worship is now universalized. It will occur wherever worshipers gather together.

So you read in 1 Peter 2, "You," that is you all, you plural, you yourselves, "are living stones being built into a spiritual house." Whose house? God's house. A temple where God made dwell. Paul spells it out to be Ephesians, "You, you all are members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus being the integrating cornerstone in whom the whole structure grows into a holy temple in the Lord. You are being built together into a dwelling place for God by his Spirit." Where is God uniquely present in the world? He's present everywhere but he is uniquely, he is covenantally, he is personally present where those living stones are gathered together, connected to Christ. He is present wherever God's church gathers, meets together, assembles together so that Paul can write to the Corinthians that the gathered church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. "You," plural, "are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Your," plural, "body," that is the church, "is the temple of the Holy Spirit."

It's from believers now that Ezekiel's vision of the final temple with living water flowing from it that wherever it goes it touches people's lives and makes them live and refreshes them, now it is the people of God. "You," says Jesus, "all who come to me, all who drink of me, out of them will flow rivers of living water." His church will become the mountain of God, the Zion of God from which streams of living water and life flow to touch and transform and bring to life stuff that is dead, people who are dead. New life to the world.

Now says Paul to Timothy, "You know you have been in the presence of God. You're part of God's church. You know that God is especially present when his people gather together. You have known that. You know that you are generally in the presence of God but you have known the solemnity of that moment when you were set apart for the Gospel in the presence of the people of God who are living stones in the heavenly temple and who when they are gathered become the very touchdown point where God is pleased to come and meet with his own." I want to say apply this to those of us who are facing crises in their lives, who are going through a period of circumstances going against you and you're asking all kinds of questions and perhaps you are struggling on your own, praying about things on your own, wrestling with things on your own. Feeling isolated, thinking that what you need is to get out into the wide open spaces as I was last week and meet with God there in the outdoor spaces in your isolation and your loneliness. I want to say to you: you need to be with God's people. You need to gather with God's people. You need to be here. You need to be here this morning where God can speak to you from his throne by his word. You need to join in the praises of God's people. You need to feel the

power there is, the very authority of God that is here, the power of God that is here because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon God's people as they gather together.

I charge you in the presence, the presence of God. He speaks to him about judgment. Judgment. God will have the last word in history. You notice how comprehensive, he will be the judge of the living and the dead. When Jesus returns, when he comes again in power and glory, there will be people still alive and he will judge them. There will be people that have gone before who have died who are still alive in the spirit but they are dead physically up to that point, their bodies are dead until that resurrection day. He will judge everybody, in other words, everybody in history. Every person who has ever, will ever live, he will judge them on that day. He will judge us believers on that day.

There is a sense in which the judgment has already passed. John says this in John 3, "He who believes in Jesus is not judged, is not condemned but he who does not believe is condemned or judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." So there is a sense in which we start condemned. We start our lives condemned, judged already because we haven't believed in Jesus. And if you are still alive out there and I have to make that assumption, even though there is no sign of life sometimes, if you're still hearing me, this is a day in which you can change. The verdict if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the verdict of condemnation is reversed and you are justified. You are made right before the High Court of heaven. Your sin is pardoned. New life given to you. Hope of glory in a moment of time. How? By believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. And on that final day, that day of judgment, it will be demonstrated to the watching world how it was that God justified sinners like you and me. It will be demonstrated to a watching world that God's judgment of sinners is absolutely right. If he has justified sinners, it was absolutely legal. On that day, he will demonstrate to the world that the Lord Jesus lived the righteous requirements of the law that were expected of you and I and that the Lord Jesus undertook the punishment that you and I deserved. On that final day it will be demonstrated to the world that God has with justice justified sinners like you and I and it will be demonstrated to the watching world that there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

But on that day of judgment, it will also be a day of separation because if you're not justified on that day, you will be judged on that day and forever, forever separated from the presence of God. We think judgment is a terrible thing but, do you know something? Sometimes judgment is a necessary resolution to some of life's great inequities, a reversal of injustices that have been done. A dealing with the inequities. On that day, the people who thought they had gotten off Scott free, I don't know why they call it Scott free, by the way, but those people who think they have gotten off Scott free will have to pay up on the day. On that day, the child abusers and the spousal abusers who were never caught, never punished, never judged, will be judged on that day. All the misrepresentations of this life that destroyed a person's reputation will be set right on that day.

Judgment. Not only judgment but do you notice thirdly, the appearing. The appearing. What does he mean by this appearing? Let me put it like this: we think about the cross,

we're going to be thinking about the cross in a moment as we gather around the Lord's Table and we'll be looking backwards to that turning point in history. The appearing refers to something in the future; it refers to the culminating point of human history. In Hebrews 9, there are 3 uses of this word "to appear," and they are helpful, I think, in understanding exactly what the apostle is referring to here. For example, in verse 24 of Hebrews 9, he refers to the present appearing of Christ. "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf." Where is the human Jesus now? Where is the man Christ Jesus today? He is located in heaven, that is, in the immediate presence of God. He is there and he is there representing us. His very presence there, bearing the wounds of his passion. His very presence there as our Mediator, as our Redeemer, as the slain Lamb of God who has been raised from the dead. His very presence there, his presence in space and time before Almighty God is the standing security of every believer.

"Before the throne of God above,
I have a strong, a perfect plea,
A great High Priest whose name is love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me."

The writer to the Hebrews refers to backwards in time. He says this, that this one who now appears has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. He is pointing backwards to the cross. Jesus really appeared. He had real flesh and blood. If you cut him, he bled. If you nailed him, he bled enormous amounts of blood. He was able to die. It was real flesh. Jesus really appeared in the flesh.

Now, says the writer, the one who appeared, the one who appears, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. That's the way in which Paul uses the word here in 2 Timothy 4:1. It's that appearing, the appearing at the end of history, the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus about which he speaks. He uses a number of words to describe that. Parousia is one of the Greek words that's used which refers to a coming, an arrival and a presence. Are your parents coming? Yes they are. And when they arrive and when they are sitting in your living room, they have come. The Lord Jesus is coming in that sense. He is coming. He will arrive and he will be present. Or you take another word, the word "apocalypsis" revelation to take back the curtain or the veil. We don't see Jesus right now. He is out of sight as he was when he was raised up to heaven and before the disciples as they are looking up, gazing into heaven, a cloud comes and takes him out of sight. In other words, he's there but we just can't see him. He hasn't disappeared. We just can't see him. There is a dimensional problem. We can't see into the dimension where Jesus is at the right hand of God but there is coming a day when the dimensional curtain will be pulled away and we shall see him. Every eye shall see him robed in dreadful majesty as he comes on that day. Then there is the word that's used here, epiphaneia, epiphany, appearance. He will put in an appearance.

Famous people do that, don't they? A president or a prime minister or some celebrity will come to a party or an event and they will make an appearance. Everybody will seem them. All the cameras will take pictures of them and they make an appearance. When it says that Jesus will appear, he's going to make an appearance, alright, his appearance is going to make every other appearance fade into extinction. He will appear a second time. Listen to what it says in Titus, "Our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." God and of Christ Jesus appearing.

Here you are in church this morning and you believe in Jesus but you doubt. You have your moments when so many questions come to the forefront of your mind or you are distracted by the circumstances you're going through and you think to yourself, "Well, I believe but wouldn't it be wonderful to have more certainty. I believe but mixed in with my belief is there is a lack of assurance perhaps." And many of us have to go through periods in our lives where we are struggling between believing and doubting. In fact, belief and doubt seem to go hand in hand, to doubt and yet believe that he is really there. "Lord," in the language of the disciples, "Lord, we believe but help our unbelief." That's reality, isn't it? We believe and don't believe at the same time and sometimes it even wants to get a wrench and put in between and separate between those 2 things. Focus on your unbelief. Focus on your doubts. Focus on your questions. Can you imagine what that day when Jesus appears is going to do to your doubts and your questions? The day that Jesus appears, all the doubts washed away. Every question answered. All your despair vanishing in a moment. No more uncertainty. No need for faith any longer. Faith becomes sight. You see him. You see him there in all his splendor and his glory. You see him in all his physicality and all his reality. You see him. Every eye seeing him. He makes his spectacular, eternal appearance and his believing people become his seeing, worshiping, joyful people.

He will appear a second time. You should be living in light of that every day. Martin Luther said, "I live as if Jesus died yesterday, rose today and were coming tomorrow." And when he comes, the kingdom, the dominion, the dominion, the dominion that Adam was given and lost, the dominion that Jesus is the second Adam has won by his obedience, that dominion, that kingdom. He comes in his kingdom to reign, to have dominion, to have dominion from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth.

Well, of course, he reigns just now. He's on the throne of David. From there he reigns over history. He rules the world today sometimes using the world in its disobedience, using it as an instrument to discipline and chastise his own church because he rules the world for the sake of his church. He has crown rights over all of his people. What we do today is we proclaim the King has come. We proclaim the claims of the King over his own subjects, believing people. We submit to him as we believe what he tells us to believe and we behave how he tells us to behave. When we gather Sunday by Sunday like this, we are gathering as people who belong to another country and who have another allegiance beyond our allegiance to this country and we bow the knee to him and we receive his authority and we pray, "Your kingdom come." What are we praying when we pray that? That your kingdom which is invisible to the eyes of men except when it is identified by local churches that are kind of mini-representations of the kingdom, an

embassy of heaven on earth, may that kingdom that is working silently and secretly in the hearts and minds of men and women all over the world drawing them to Christ, establishing Jesus as Lord in their lives, may that kingdom come. May it come in its fullness. May it come finally. May it come visibly. May it come gloriously. May it come triumphantly. Hasten the day when our prayers will be answered and Jesus will come to establish that dominion that will not pass away and that kingdom that will never be destroyed. Hasten the day when the sound of the angels crying out with loud voices will be heard by everybody in all of human history, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and forever." That day. That day when truth which is often overthrown will be established once and for all. That day when justice which is not always done in this fallen world will be done once and for all. That day when tears which flow copiously in moments of stress or pain or anguish will be dried finally. That day when Jesus comes. When the kingdom comes in all its splendor. When the enemies of God are finally overwhelmed. When all the heresies and false ideas and doctrines of demons and mouths that speak these things will finally be stopped. That day. That day for which our hearts yearn and for which we cry when we say, "Come Lord Jesus. Let your kingdom come," will finally be answered. That day. That day will come.

"Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favored sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train:
Hallelujah! Jesus comes and comes to reign."

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that we live our lives in the presence of God but we thank you that you especially are present here today in the preaching of your word. Your voice has been heard and now at this table where you will feed us the bread of heaven, where we will eat and drink together as those who are in the presence of our great divine Host, Jesus, who will give us the bread through his body and the cup and we will share together in this feast that points us forward to that great day when kingdom come and the King is seen and our eyes behold him in his beauty and we feast together with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the children of God, the heavenly banquet. Hasten the day. Come. Come, come Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.