



Eschatology

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)

THESIS: The return of Jesus is a foundational reality for the Christian’s life and is consistently presented by Scripture as a basis for how we are to live our lives. Far from being a marginal doctrine, eschatology should be a central concern in the lives of Christians to help us orient our lives properly and live in light of what matters.

WHAT IS AT STAKE: Ignoring eschatology, either because it seems a difficult or unimportant doctrine, is like forgetting the finish line in a race. The Christian life, indeed, all of history has a goal. We cannot understand either the world or our lives properly without the framework that is established by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus on the one hand, and his return on the other.

The foundational beliefs of Christian eschatology are that Jesus Christ is returning and that his return will bring about the judgment of the wicked and the salvation of those who have trusted in him. This return will bring about the eternal state, where all those whose names are not found in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment and where all those who belong to Jesus will spend eternity in a recreated heavens and earth enjoying God’s presence forever. God’s glory will be displayed in its fullness, shared with his people, and enjoyed for all eternity. There will be no more death, sadness, pain, or sin, only perfect fellowship with God (Habakkuk 2:14; Matthew 25:46; John 17:24; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Peter 3:1-13; Revelation 14:9-11; 20:11-22:5).

The teaching at First Boynton generally holds to a historic premillennial position. This position has two main tenants in its understanding of eschatology in addition to those listed above. First, God’s people, the church, will endure the tribulation, facing Satan’s persecutions. They will live through God’s wrath, but will not experience it, much as the Israelites lived through the plagues but did not experience their consequences. The rapture will take place at the end of the tribulation when Christ returns. The dead in Christ will rise

first, then those who are left alive will be transformed, and we will meet Christ in the air to be with him forever. This eternal reign will begin with joining Christ to rule over his kingdom (Exodus 9:4, 26; 10:23; 11:7; Ezekiel 9:4-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 14:1; 20:4-6).

Second, Jesus will reign on the earth after his return and prior to the eternal state. His kingdom will be one of perfect justice and righteousness where every knee bows and tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, though not every heart. Satan will be bound, but upon his release will lead a great rebellion that will be crushed in a moment (Revelation 20:1-11).

Eschatology is an intensely practical doctrine. It is true that we cannot know when Jesus will return, but the focus of the doctrine is not "When?" but "What?" Scripture regularly discusses what will happen and moves to an exhortation on how to live now. It is instructive that Jesus' command to the disciples in light of the fact that they could not know when he would return was, "Watch therefore" (Matthew 25:13). That we will not be able to foretell Jesus' return should prompt us to be vigilant. The parables of the ten virgins and the talents which surround Jesus' pronouncement make the same point. A proper Christian life is lived in anticipation of the return of our master (1 Peter 1:13). Even the Lord's Supper, a celebration that focuses on Jesus' death and resurrection, is described in relation to the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:26). There is nothing to celebrate in Jesus' death and resurrection if he is not returning. In Jesus' farewell discourse, the first form of encouragement Jesus offers, before the reminders that he has overcome the world (John 16:33), that he will see them after his death (John 14:18-19), or that he will send the Spirit after his departure (John 16:7), is that that he will return for them (John 14:1-5).

The reality of Christ's return is joy in the midst of suffering and balm in the midst of pain (Matthew 5:11-12; Romans 8:18, 23-25, 1 Peter 5:9-10). It establishes our priorities as eternal not temporal (Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Timothy 5:18-19). Our hope is not that we will avoid suffering, but that suffering will end and be replaced by glory (2 Corinthians 4:7-15). Our hope is not that God's enemies will not affect us, but that his enemies will one day be destroyed, including Satan and death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Revelation 20:7-10). Our hope is not that our bodies will not fail, but that they will be raised imperishable even if we die (John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:26-28, 42-44, 50-58; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 1:21-23). It is our great hope to be found blameless at the day of Christ and to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:21; Philippians 1:10-11; 2 Peter 1:3-11). It is this hope that God has given us so we can endure trials and afflictions of this world, afflictions that can be described as light and momentary in view of an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

SO WHAT: Our eschatology has a direct influence on how we live. We will either live governed by the reality of eternity, shored up by hope and strengthened to shine brightly in

the midst of a warped and crooked generation, storing up imperishable treasures in heaven, or we will be governed by the cares of this life. The former is a source of joy, now and forever. The latter will fill our lives with wood, hay, and stubble, which will one day be burned (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). The hope of Christ's return orients us to a life that can truly be lived to the glory of God.