

Expecting the King's Return



The First Church (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again sharing with you precious insights out of Scripture that have made the difference between success and failure in my life and can do the same in yours.

Our theme for this week is "The First Church." We've been taking a quick trip back in time to have a look at our spiritual roots. I've said that in the first church, as described in the New Testament, and primarily in the Book of Acts, God set a standard and a pattern from which He has never departed. He never had to have a re-trial, He never had to have a second attempt to set the church in motion or to bring it into being. When He brought it into being in the New Testament, it was right the first time, the way He wanted it. He's never changed His specifications, He's never changed His standards, He's never changed His plan. It still stands the same. That's why it's so important that we be able to identify what the first church was like because it's still what God wants His church to be like today.

In my previous talks to help us do this, I've pointed out certain distinctive features which were characteristic of that first church. First of all, they were witnesses to all men. Second, they were permeated in every area of their lives by supernatural power. Third, they proclaimed a king and a kingdom. They were the heralds, the representatives on earth of a kingdom and almost everywhere they came with this message of a King and a kingdom, they disturbed the existing political order.

Today I'm going to point out a fourth distinctive feature, one which follows on very naturally from the third. The members of the first church not merely proclaimed the King, they also looked forward to the imminent return of the King. They were, in a sense, just doing a job that had to be done to prepare the was for His return. But the ultimate aim of the job they were doing was to make sure that He came back.

This was, for them, the ultimate motivation, the ultimate joy, the ultimate purpose of living—to be ready and to have done their task in preparing the way for the return of their King. We find this brought out consistently in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians. I'm going to read three successive passages from that epistle. First of all, 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2,

verses 19 and 20. Paul, writing to the Christians there says:

> "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

You see, that was the motive of their service. Why were they ministering to the believers, building them up, seeking to make them the kind of people that God desired them to be because when the Lord Jesus returned, they would be their crown and their joy and their glory in His presence. They were always looking forward to that glorious moment: the return of the King. This was also a continual motivation for holiness in their personal living. In the next chapter of 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 12 and 13, Paul says this:

> "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

You see, they have the motivation for being blameless and holy. They knew that in due course the King was going to return, they were going to gather before the King, they were going to present their converts, those whom they had brought to the Lord to the King—the King, in turn, was going to present them to His Father. So Paul prayed, "May [the Lord] strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes." That was what they were consistently looking forward to.

And then again, in the next chapter of 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4 (a rather longer passage), verses 13–18, Paul is speaking about Christians who had already died before the return of the Lord. He was assuring those believers that they would all be reunited when the Lord returned. And this is how he explains it. He gives what is in a sense a very vivid preview of what will happen.

> "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep [that is, who died, but the Bible only speaks of death as falling asleep for those who are believers in Christ. Those are the only people for whom death is just falling asleep. They're going to awake on the resurrection morning.] Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope [what a tragic phrase! Those who don't know the Lord have no hope in their death. The Book of Proverbs says, 'The righteous have hope in his death.'] We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. [Notice 'bring with Jesus.' They were looking forward to Jesus coming and those believers coming with Him.] According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. [Notice the end to which he is looking is the coming of the Lord.] For the Lord himself will comedown from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first [that's resolving their fears about not meeting those believers who'd already died]. After that [after the dead in Christ have arisen from the dead], we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. [That's the great reunion of all true believers. There's going to be a reunion with the Lord as He comes in the clouds. It's not going to be on the level of earth. It's going to be in the air.] And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words."

So, you notice that the final source of encouragement in all their troubles and their persecutions which were so many was, "Our King is coming back. We're all going to meet Him. We're all going to be together with Him and with one another forever."

Now, 1 Thessalonians was an early epistle, but the same emphasis continues to the last verses of the last book of the New Testament—that's the Book of Revelation. Revelation, chapter 22, verse 20, Jesus Himself closing the Revelation says:

> "He who testifies to these things [that's Jesus Christ] says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' [And then the writer replies:] Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

That's the last prayer in the Bible. And it's a prayer for Jesus to come. But all through the message of the New Testament church there's this emphasis on the return of the King. Because of their continuing emphasis on the return of the King, the early church influenced their society with a new viewpoint. They pointed the way to a higher plane and a

future age. They said, in effect, “This earth isn’t ultimate. This age isn’t the last. There’s something coming in the future and we’re expecting it imminently. It’s coming from a heavenly level. It’s a new age. And it’s going to be a whole lot better than the present one.”

Now people sometimes today dismiss that with the phrase, “pie in the sky.” But, you see, it was not so for the early church because this kingdom that they were proclaiming and this King whose coming they were awaiting had already become a reality in their present experience. And wherever they went, they brought with them the testimony and the power of this kingdom which was extremely potent and extremely disturbing to many of their contemporaries. This was all the result of the supernatural seal of the Holy Spirit upon them. Of this supernatural seal Paul speaks in Ephesians 1, 13 and 14, and he says:

> “...you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [The Holy Spirit is like a seal placed on a registered parcel that sets it aside and declares it’s not to be tampered with. Then he goes on to say:] the Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”

Let me say a little about that word “deposit,” it’s a fascinating word. In Greek, it’s arrabon; in Hebrew, it’s arravon; in Arabic, it’s arbon and it’s also found in other languages. Now you might wonder what that means. Let me illustrate with a little incident.

Many years ago when I lived in Jerusalem, I wanted to buy drapes for a house we’d moved into. I went to a little stall in the Old City market, I picked out some material with my wife that we thought was suitable, we inquired the price, and let us say it was five dollars a yard (that’s just an estimate), we needed twenty yards, so it was going to cost a hundred dollars. I said, “That’s what we want. I want you to set aside that twenty yards. Don’t sell it to anybody else and I’m giving you now twenty dollars as a deposit.” That word in Arabic, “deposit,” arbon. That meant: This is set aside for me. I’m coming back to claim it. You can’t sell it to anybody else. When I come back, I’ll come with the rest of the money.

Well, the Holy Spirit’s seal on us as Christians, this supernatural seal is God’s deposit on us. It means He’s paid that much already. He’s set us aside. We can’t be sold to anybody else. And it’s the guarantee that He’s coming back with the rest of the money to claim us for Himself. You see, this is what the Holy Spirit does. It makes the return of Jesus an absolute assured guarantee.

Well, our time is up for today. I’ll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. In my closing talk on this theme tomorrow, I’ll be explaining how we can experience this kind of Christianity today.

Radio Program

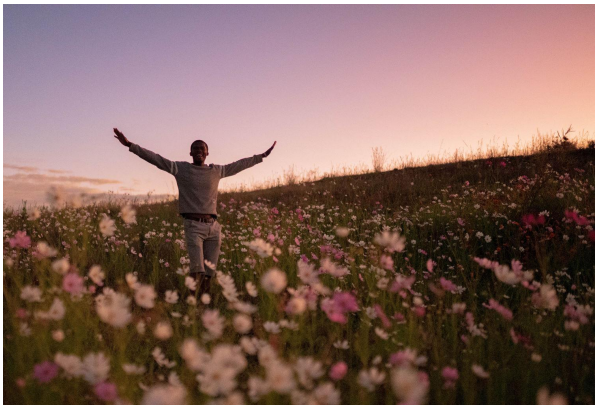
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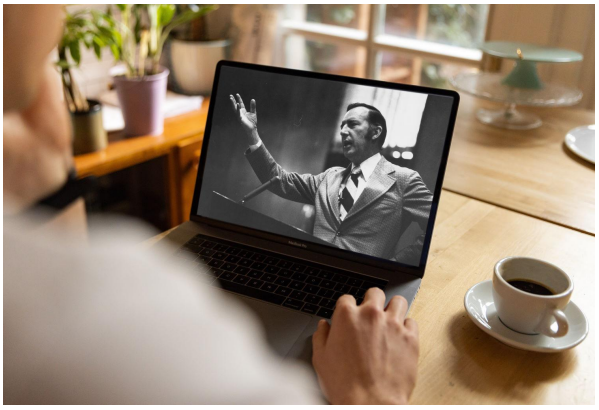
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