

"YOU PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH UNTIL HE COMES"

1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11

At communion we remember what God has done for us in Jesus – a time when we look back to the events which took place on Golgotha on Good Friday and give God thanks for the sacrifice which Jesus made on our behalf. But we usually end our remembrance by looking forward, often using the words, "*Christ has died, Christ is risen, **Christ will come again.***" And in his instructions to the Corinthian Christians about communion, Paul writes that "*we proclaim the Lord's death **until he comes***" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

We should never lose sight of the fact that Jesus is going to return. We recall the past to help us make sense of the present, but we should also live the present in the light of what God has promised for the future. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the coming return of Jesus and tells them to "*encourage each other with these words*" (1 Thessalonians 4:18). The fact that we, as followers of Jesus, know what the future holds should affect our lives now.

1. WE ARE PEOPLE OF THE FUTURE NOT THE PAST

Although we must never forget what Jesus has already done for us and be grateful for our Christian heritage, we must keep our eye on the future, too. It can be very easy to live in the past and hang on to things that are no longer relevant or useful. Tony Campolo wrote: "*Christianity was born in Palestine. They took it to Greece and turned it into a philosophy. They took it to Rome and made it into an institution. They took it to America and made it into a business. They took it to England and made it into a tourist attraction.*"

2. WE ARE PEOPLE OF VICTORY NOT OF FAILURE

We often find our selves taking refuge in the past because we are afraid and uncertain of the future. Our vocabulary is often one of failure, when Jesus has actually enabled us to share in his victory. The outcome of the final struggle between good and evil is assured – Jesus has won! We must live as people of victory.

3. WE ARE PEOPLE OF FAITH NOT OF DOUBT

We can find it difficult to believe that we are on the winning side when we look at the evil which is still apparent in the world. But if we don't believe that Jesus is coming back as Victor, we might as well give up now. But if we do believe, then that should make an obvious difference to the way in which we live our lives now.

Questions for discussion

1. How often do you think about the return of Jesus?
2. Christians are often accused of living in the past. To what extent do you think the past should affect what we do today? Should we be providing a changeless refuge for people who are struggling with change? Why/why not?
3. How should the victory of Jesus on the cross and on Easter morning affect our lives now?
4. Living as people of victory can lead us into an empty triumphalism. How can we guard against that?
5. How sure can we be that Jesus will return? (After all, the New Testament writers said 2,000 years ago that it was imminent – and it hasn't happened yet!)
6. In what ways can we "*encourage each other with these words*"?