



SESSION 3

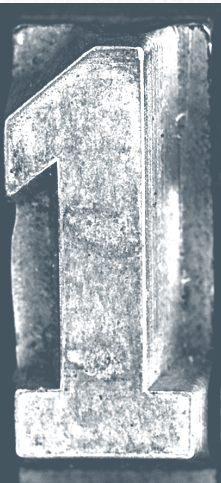
THE PRESENCE OF THE FUTURE

What's interesting and constant about the Hollywood picture of the future is that it isn't perfect. There are the unpleasant depictions like *The Terminator*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Matrix*. But even the seemingly happier depictions of the future have underlying conflict. After all, a movie without conflict isn't much of a story.

How fascinating and completely unimaginable it is, therefore, to think of a future in which conflict and struggle are completely eradicated! A world where death, disease, sickness, sorrow, and sin are undone, all that is wrong is made right, and "everything sad comes untrue," as J. R. R. Tolkien put it.

A glorious eternity is precisely the picture that emerges from the pages of Scripture. Even more amazing, the Bible presents the church as a foretaste of this faultless and unfading future. We are the presence of the future, a present colony of heaven awaiting the return of Christ.

As the Bride of Christ, Christians are to...



Focus on Jesus

Humans love to seek, and the Bible teaches that the act of seeking and searching is a good thing. Jesus commanded us to seek first the Kingdom and God's righteousness, to ask, seek, and knock (Matt. 6:33; 7:7-8). Nothing is more natural and necessary than searching and seeking and looking.

What we most treasure, we seek. As many have noted, the greatest gift of the gospel is that we get God Himself. Since He is our treasure, it stands to reason that we would naturally yearn to seek after Him more and more.

► What terms do you tend to use when you describe your devotion to Jesus? Why do you think many are uncomfortable describing their thoughts of Jesus Christ with words such as *treasure, savor, yearn, desire, and cherish*?

Colossians 3:1-4

So if you have been raised with the Messiah, seek what is above, where the Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God. When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

We could look at other passages in order to emphasize this point further (see Isa. 26:7-9; Phil. 3:7-11). The Bible says we are to seek what is above as a general pattern for our lives in Christ. This is not some mindless or careless seeking. We are not searching for purpose but for a Person. Our purpose has already been revealed, and it is fixed upon this Person, Jesus Christ.

► How can we begin to seek what is above even in the more mundane details of life?

Confident in the Future

This past summer I caught World Cup® fever. I have never really watched much soccer before, but I got caught up in the excitement of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. The World Cup is the most prestigious soccer tournament in the world, and it happens every four years. The US National Team was expected to be good and hopefully advance far into the tournament. Their first game was a match against Ghana. I was pretty excited to see it, but I had to work that evening. Before I left for work, I set the TV to record the game so I could watch it when I got home. I went into blackout mode the rest of the evening. I turned off all of the notifications on my phone, and told all of my friends not to say a word about the game. I didn't want to know what happened until I could watch it for myself.

When I left work and headed home, I even turned off the radio so I wouldn't hear any news about the game. However, when I arrived home, my wife greeted me at the door and unknowingly said, "Wasn't that an amazing win for the US?" I had forgotten to tell her that I had taped the game to watch later.

Of course, I still watched the game; however, I noticed something different. When Ghana scored a goal with only eight minutes left in the match, I wasn't worried because I knew the US was going to win. And they did. The US scored the winning goal four minutes later.

The Christian view of the future is a lot like me watching that soccer match and knowing how it would finish. God has already revealed what the future will be. In fact, God tells us that our future in Christ is one filled with glory. No matter what happens today, we know that our future is secured in Christ.



Live as Kingdom Citizens

The Bible describes the church as a colony of heaven, a people whose citizenship is in God's kingdom. Ruled from a foreign land, the church dwells upon this earth as citizens of that far country.

Originally a colonial outpost of Rome, Philippi had long enjoyed the privileges of citizenship. From what we know of that time and place, most Philippians would have been quite proud of their citizenship. (Citizenship in the Roman Empire was a precious thing.) This fact makes Paul's words all the more incredible. Some might have even considered them treasonous.

There's No Place Like Home

As the old saying goes, there is no place like home. Every time I travel away from home, I am always ready to get back. I like to travel and I've had opportunities to travel for school and work numerous times. A few years ago, I got a chance to go to Paris, France. It was fun. I saw some sights, ate great food, and even got to use the little bit of French that I know. I enjoyed my stay in France, but by the end of the trip, I was ready to return home.

Home is a great place. I don't have to speak another language there. I know where everything is, and the best part is that I feel like I belong there. That is what makes home a great place. It's a great place because it's your place. When I think of home I think of two places. The first place is where I currently live. The second is the place where I grew up and my parents still live. To this day, when someone asks me where I am from, I always answer with the place that I grew up.

For a Christian, it's much the same. We have two homes. One is temporary and the other is eternal. The Bible says that our true home, the eternal one, is in heaven. We are here on the earth for only a little while, and this temporary home not only should make us anticipate our eternal home in heaven, but also impact how we live today.

► **What characteristics should be true of our Kingdom identity?**

For Paul, the truest and most important citizenship of Christians was not to Rome but to the kingdom of God. Thus, as a natural implication, ultimate allegiance would not be owed to Caesar but to Christ. He alone is Lord. For us today, this means that even if our passports are stamped with the seal of the USA, the UK, or the UAE, it is ultimately the Lord to whom we belong.

Philippians 3:20

But our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

► **What's the difference between passively waiting for Christ's return and actively waiting?**



Prepare for Jesus' Return

Not only must we set our minds on future glory and see ourselves as a colony of heaven, we must also recognize that we are the bride of Christ. Perhaps no image best communicates our role as the “presence of the future” as that of engagement and marriage.

We are the bride of Christ. And the Bible speaks of a day in which our marriage to Christ will be consummated in unending joy. The last book of the Bible paints a picture of a glorious wedding feast, with Jesus as the groom and the church as the bride.

The Bible speaks of at least two separate tasks that the saints are to carry out in preparation for our future: evangelism and good works.

► What are some good ways we can prepare for the marriage supper of the Lamb?

Revelation 19:6-9

Then I heard something like the voice of a vast multitude, like the sound of cascading waters, and like the rumbling of loud thunder, saying: Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, has begun to reign! Let us be glad, rejoice, and give Him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has prepared herself. She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure. For the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: Those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb are fortunate!” He also said to me, “These words of God are true.”

Bride of Christ

When I first became a pastor I had no idea of all the things that pastors do. Sure, I thought that I would be preaching and teaching regularly, overseeing ministries of the church, and visiting people, but I didn't think of all the other little things that pastors do. I love doing all of it. It's a good reminder that a pastor is a servant of the church. However, without a doubt, my favorite thing about being a pastor is performing a wedding.

Performing a wedding ceremony is incredibly fun. I get to counsel a couple to help strengthen their relationship. I get to help them plan their ceremony. In fact, I have even been asked to consult about the food choice at the reception. However, while all the planning is fun, nothing compares to the actual wedding day. There is the excitement over the wedding, and then food and cake to be enjoyed afterwards. But of all the great things that happen on a wedding day, my absolute favorite is when the bride begins to walk down the aisle. It is right then that I often look over at the groom and notice how his beaming facial expression tells of his great love for her.

I have been a part of dozens of weddings, and not once have I seen the bride not ready for the ceremony. She always looks amazing. And every time I am a part of a wedding I think of a greater wedding to come. The Bible tells us that the church is the bride of Christ, and when God restores creation, there will be an amazing wedding feast. Just like every bride prepares for her wedding, as believers in Christ we are called to do the same by anticipating the return of our Savior.

► What can we do to increase our participation in inviting others to the Lord's wedding feast?

GOD'S STORY, YOUR STORY

This lesson reminds us that it's important to properly view the here and now of our everyday lives. The future can influence the present, and focusing upon Christ and eagerly awaiting His return can alter the way we live as Christians today.

In addition, it teaches us that knowing how the future relates to the present can be a great tool for making wise decisions. Because some things in the future are certain, we should live wisely knowing that our actions matter and that we will all be held accountable for how we live today.

How can the future alter the way you live in the present? Do you typically just live for the present? If so, why?

Have you ever heard the phrase: “only one life, till soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.” This short poem has a way of pointing out the fact that this life does matter, and it is not pointless or meaningless as some would suggest. Because of Christ’s resurrection and promised return, we live hopeful in the present and believe that our finite choices here on earth can have eternal consequences.

How can you incorporate the truth of Jesus’ return into your everyday decisions? How would your decisions look different as a result of this truth? Give an example.