

1 Thessalonians 1 (10) – Jesus Is Returning

Are you a Christian? I didn't ask if you've said a prayer. Being a Christian is not a matter of repeating a prayer. Now, I want to be clear that yes, Christianity involves prayer, and you can come to God for salvation through prayer. You confess to God that you're a sinner. You ask for the forgiveness of your sin, based on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. And you confess Jesus as Lord, placing your faith in him for your salvation. Then you come to get baptized, and you begin to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, here is the thing with that. The New Testament takes a lot of time describing what salvation looks like, and how real Christians will think, act, and live. Because people who are saved aren't just doing whatever they might want with no discernable Christian life and witness. Real Christians live out what they say they believe in. And God had the writers of the NT address people who are not really believers, but who are deceived. Because there are people who have said a prayer, who have been baptized, and who might think are living the Christian life. But they are not really Christians.

So again, being a Christian is not a matter of repeating a prayer. Being a Christian is a matter of being born again, which means you have a new life, a different life than you did before. The Holy Spirit resides in real Christians, and it changes the way you think, the way you act, the way you are. It isn't about perfection; it is about direction. But that direction isn't in general, it is specific. And in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10, the Apostle Paul was giving the Thessalonians evidences that proved they were born again Christians.

In vs.6, we saw the first two evidences. The first evidence of salvation is community. Paul says, *"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord."* Walking with Jesus means walking with others who walk with Jesus. The second evidence was perseverance. Paul says, *"for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit."* Clinging to God in faith, and the power of God to give you joy in Jesus in hard situations, this is another evidence of salvation. You walk the hard, narrow road with others.

In vs.7, Paul said, *“you became an example.”* Living as an example of faith, in a way that is vibrant, and growing, this is more evidence of salvation. The Thessalonians had heard about Jesus from Paul. Then they began to follow Jesus, after the manner of Paul. Then they became examples to others, just as Paul had been an example to them. They were hearers of the word, then doers of the word, and their lives became teachers of the word.

In vs.8, Paul said, *“your faith in God has gone forth everywhere.”* This was more evidence. The Thessalonians had become enthusiastically evangelistic. These believers were spreading the good news about Jesus everywhere. They were talking about the faith, and other people were talking about them. Genuine Christians tell people about Jesus. It is another evidence of saving faith.

In vs.9, Paul says true believers will believe in God’s word, and proclaim it as true. *For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you* – People from all over knew that the Thessalonian church had welcomed the gospel and proclaimed it to others. Paul didn’t have to ask how it was going in Thessalonica. The Thessalonians were “living out loud.” And Paul was hearing about it before he even asked about it.

Paul continues in vs.9 by saying that the Thessalonians *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.* This is more evidence. They turned from their idols and they also turned to Christ. Our idols today aren’t made of metal, wood, or stone. People today have idols when they think there are things they cannot live without, or that they can’t be happy without. Repentance is about turning from your idols and turning towards God. It is about replacing your idols, one by one, with God as the center of your life.

In vs.10, Paul gives the Thessalonians more evidence. He knew that God had saved them because they were obviously and eagerly looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ. This is the pattern among God’s people.

and to wait for his Son – This word “wait” is used here in the present infinitive; think of it like an infinite present tense, right down the line of time. In other

words, it is something that you keep on waiting for. However long it takes, you don't give up, you keep looking for it to happen.

The Thessalonians kept looking for King Jesus even as they kept living for Lord Jesus. You can see that vs.3-9 are shaped and supported by vs.10. The future focus of the Thessalonians was manifest in how they were living for Christ right now. The other evidences that Paul gave in vs.3-9 are proof of that. And the rest of the New Testament agrees with that.

People who are saved aren't just waiting on Jesus with no discernable Christian life and witness. Christians live out loud what they believe in their heart. That's the way it was with the Thessalonians. It was obvious that they had *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (vs.9), and to wait for his Son from heaven (vs.10)*. These all go together. Truly waiting on Jesus means truly living for Jesus. Paul says that this is the pattern of saved people. And make sure you don't miss this point: The Thessalonians were doing all this living for Christ because they were waiting for Christ. The more you're truly waiting for Jesus, the more you're truly working for Jesus. That is the truth. And that is how it ought to be with you and me.

God has placed a longing for the return of Jesus in every believer's heart. It isn't something that is just intended to be a help for when you feel discouraged. It is certainly that, but it is also much more. For the maturing believer, it is an increasing expectation, motivation, and regulation.

Longing for the return of Jesus is an expectation – Relishing Jesus' return increases as you realize that each day is one day closer to his appearing. Romans 13:11 – *For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed*. The closer you get, the more you prepare.

Jesus is going to rescue his people (1 Thessalonians 5:9), render judgment to his enemies (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10), and rule and reign in a forever kingdom on Earth (Revelation 19:15). And true Christians are truly desiring that day; it is an anchor of hope in your heart.

If there is no return of Christ, there will be no judgment against injustice, no mercy for your sins, no renewal of your body, no renewal of the Earth, no reunion with loved ones, and no hope for an eternal future. But Jesus Christ will return, to make all things right. And as the things of this world show themselves to be incapable of satisfying the true longing of your redeemed hearts, your heart cries out, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” (Revelation 22:20).

So, longing for the return of Jesus is an **expectation**. And longing for the return of Jesus is also a **motivation** – The return of Jesus Christ reminds you that this life is going to end, and that your next life will never end. The next life is the motivation and goal for this life. Because how you live this life will shape how you enjoy your eternal life. The more you see your mortality, and this life’s finality, the more you see your eternity, and it motivates you to go for God’s rewards. That is true by God’s design.

Matthew 6:19-21 – Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Philippians 3:14 – I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:8 – Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Revelation 22:12 – Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

This waiting is not passive; it is active. And that doesn’t just mean “doing stuff.” It also means “enduring stuff,” persevering with praise for God in hard situations. Like the Thessalonians were doing (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7). As we sing, “Just one glimpse of him in glory, will the toils of life repay.”

Longing for the return of Jesus is an expectation, a motivation, and a **regulation** – The hope of the return of Christ is meant to guide and control your thoughts and actions. When you truly live for today by having an eye for tomorrow, it makes a difference in how you live now.

Titus 2:11-14 – For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

2 Peter 3:11-14 – Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

1 John 3:2-3 – Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Jesus will return, and he will vindicate himself, his church, and his people, who have had to suffer injustice on account of following him. It is a promise, and each day is one day closer to its fulfillment (Romans 13:11). Are you living as if you believe that? It is easier to just sort of give up and coast along. But it is not the right thing to do (1 John 2:28). Jesus wants you to continue to fight the uphill battle of faith (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

In this wicked world, faithfulness through the trials and troubles of life is an act of worship (cf. Philippians 2:14-15). Are you living for Christ, winning others to Christ, and edifying your brothers and sisters in Christ?

from heaven – The return of Jesus Christ is mentioned at the end of every chapter of this letter. Christians may differ on some of the details regarding Jesus’ return, but they know that he is going to return bodily (cf. Acts 1:11 / Philippians 3:20 / Hebrews 9:28 / Revelation 1:7). And when he returns, everyone will see him (Matthew 24:27 / Revelation 1:7).

The early Christians lived as if Jesus could return in their lifetimes. Of course, believers have been anticipating that for nearly 2000 years. And yet, the call to watch and be ready remains the same. There are good reasons that the New Testament exhorts all believers, in any era, to live in anticipation that Christ could return in their lifetime. To live this way prevents the spiritual slumber and worldly satisfaction that characterizes those who will be surprised when Jesus comes again (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

The Thessalonians were not like those spiritually slumbering, “looking for their satisfaction in this world” kind of people (1 Thessalonians 5:4). They were looking for the coming King, and living like he was coming soon. Their hope was not in their own kingdoms, but in God’s kingdom. And when you truly live for today by having an eye for tomorrow, it makes a difference in how you live now (cf. Titus 2:11-14 / 2 Peter 3:12-14 / 1 John 3:2-3).

So, now, let’s finish where we started. Are you a Christian? And let’s put that in terms that this message told you. Are you longing for the return of Jesus Christ? Does the forever kingdom motivate you to live for Jesus right now? Does the hope of the Jesus returning guide and control your life?

Being a Christian isn’t a matter of simply repeating a prayer. But you can start a real Christian life by coming to God for salvation through prayer. You confess to God that you’re a sinner. You ask for the forgiveness of your sin, based on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. And you confess Jesus as Lord, placing your faith in him for your salvation. Then you come to get baptized, and you begin to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. You’ll have a new direction in life as you trust in the perfection of Jesus, God’s son. And you’ll begin to know what it means *to wait for his Son from heaven*. Amen.