

Catford Lectures 2010-2011

Part 5

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| Speaker | Catford Lectures Conference; Michael Hardt; M. Best; Geoff Hawes; Andrew Poots; Simon Attwood; C. Bell; Michael Vogelsang; Nick Fleet; Graham Warnes |
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[00:00:01] I will begin the meeting this afternoon by singing together number 364.

Have I an object, Lord below, which would divide my heart from thee, Which would divert its even flow in answer to thy constancy, Or teach me quickly to return, and cause my heart afresh to burn? Have I a hope, however dear, which would defer thy coming, Lord, Which would detain my spirit here, where naught can lasting joy afford? From it, my Saviour, set me free to look and long and wait for thee. Can we stand and sing number 364. [00:01:02] Lord above, Lord below, which would divide my heart from thee, Which would divert its even flow in answer to thy constancy, Or teach me quickly to return, and cause my heart afresh to burn?

Or teach me quickly to return, and cause my heart afresh to burn?

[00:02:13] Have I a hope, however dear, which would defer thy coming, Lord, Which would detain my spirit here, where naught can lasting joy afford?

From it, my Saviour, set me free to look and long and wait for thee.

[00:03:03] From it, my Saviour, set me free to look and long and wait for thee.

Be thou the object right and fair to fill and satisfy the heart.

My hope to be thee in the air, and never move from thee to part.

That I may undistracted be to follow, serve, and wait for thee.

[00:04:10] That I may undistracted be to follow, serve, and wait for thee.

Giving thanks. Amen. Will you turn please to the First Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians. I'm going to begin reading from the middle of verse 8 of chapter 1.

[00:05:10] In every place your faith to God is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. And now in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 24. [00:06:06] Matthew 24 verse 48.

But, and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And now back into First Thessalonians again. First Thessalonians again. Chapter 2 verse 19.

[00:07:05] For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. For ye are our glory and joy. Chapter 3 verse 12.

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you. To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

Chapter 4 verse 13.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, [00:08:08] that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. [00:09:03] But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light and the children of day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and fore in helmet the hope of salvation. [00:10:04] For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another even as also ye do. Second Thessalonians chapter 2. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand, the authorised version says, [00:11:08] the Derby translation says, is present. Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come except their comer falling away first. The man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Are ye not, when I was with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time. The mystery of iniquity doth already work, only he

who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. [00:12:03] And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It will be apparent to you from the hymn that we've sung and from the scriptures that we have read that I have on my heart to speak this evening [00:13:04] about the coming of the Lord Jesus.

And it is remarkable that the fullest development that we have of this subject perhaps is brought to us in two epistles that were written to Christians who were newly converted.

And it shows us immediately how relevant the truth of the second coming of the Lord Jesus is for young believers, for all believers.

[00:14:04] We have read those verses at the end of chapter one that show us that the saints at Thessalonica were converted to God, and they were converted to this hope also, that the Lord Jesus is coming again.

They turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God and to wait for his son from heaven, Jesus, whom he raised from the dead.

So that this is a hope that God puts before the Christian [00:15:01] from the moment that he or she is converted.

It is what we are to wait for, what we are to look for.

And we can see in the context of this first chapter of the first Thessalonian epistle how this hope sustained the Thessalonians in the persecution that they were suffering.

It gave impetus to their service for the Lord.

There was a work of faith and a labor of love. But these things were sustained because of their endurance of hope in the Lord Jesus.

[00:16:08] And I read the verses in Matthew 24 really to show how vital the holding of this hope is.

And how vital it is that we hold it in our hearts.

It is something so real to us that it has an impact upon the way we live our lives and upon the way that we serve the Lord.

And we see in Matthew 24 that this wicked servant, [00:17:05] when for all practical purposes he lost sight of the coming of the Lord, went astray precisely in these two areas.

He began to live an abandoned life.

He began to eat and to drink with the drunken.

And instead of serving the Lord in the way that the Lord intends and makes so clear in his word.

And as the very verses in the parable immediately preceding this one show that the good and faithful servant [00:18:01] is to provide food for the saints of God. Instead of doing that, this evil servant begins to smite his fellow servants.

He gets out of his place as a servant altogether.

And he begins to behave towards the saints as if he was their Lord.

That's what flows from saying in one's heart not that the Lord is not coming. It's not what he says. He says in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming.

So the exercise is today and every day of 2011, [00:19:02] if the Lord leaves us here, that we might hold this hope in our hearts and be on the tiptoe of expectation that the coming of the Lord is about to be fulfilled.

In chapters two and three of the First Thessalonian Epistle, Paul picks up on exactly these two points that we've seen in Matthew chapter 24.

The matter of service in chapter two and in chapter three, how we live our lives.

At the end of chapter two, Paul can speak with confidence [00:20:03] of that time when his work in the Lord will be made manifest.

And we know from another chapter that came from the pen of Paul, from First Corinthians chapter three, that the work of every man is to be tried.

It's going to be tested to see whether the work attains to the divine standard or is the work merely of a human character, a combustible character like wood, hay and stubble that must be burnt up.

Well, Paul can speak with confidence about his work.

[00:21:02] First of all, because of the manner of life that he lived. And he refers to this in verse 10 of chapter two, when he says, You are witnesses, and God also, how wholly and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.

And he can speak about the character of his service. What was seen in Paul's service for the Lord and verses three to six of chapter two speak of this. Our exhortation was not of deceit. That is to say, the message that they brought to the Thessalonians, they didn't bring because they were deceived persons themselves. [00:22:04] But what they brought was the word of God, which is made clear all through this letter. It was not of uncleanness nor inguile. The message that they brought was not a message that they intended to mislead the Thessalonians by to meet their own ends.

As he goes on to tell us, But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts for neither at any time used we flattering

words, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness, nor of men sought we glory, neither of you nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ. [00:23:08] And the impact of the life and service of Paul and of those that were with him left its impression upon the saints at Thessalonica. In chapter one, he says, He became followers of us and of the Lord.

And we know that from them the word of the Lord sounded out. They were examples to all the saints in Macedonia and Achaia. And from them the word of the Lord sounded out beyond those regions.

Because of the manner of the entering in that Paul and those with him had so far as the Thessalonians were concerned. [00:24:02] And so Paul sees in the Thessalonians the stamp of what had been seen in him. And so he can speak with confidence that when his work is tested in that day, all in fact will be to his joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. In the third epistle, in the third chapter of the epistle, we've seen that there is an emphasis in verse 13 upon holiness. In chapter four, in the section before we came to the verses that I read there, [00:25:01] Paul says, this is the will of God, your sanctification. And the sanctification that is the will of God for us there is practical sanctification.

We have a statement like the statement here in chapter three, verse 13 in Ephesians one. But in Ephesians one, the statement is made and is absolute and rests wholly upon the work of the Lord Jesus. And consequently, when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ as to our persons, we shall be unblameable in holiness before God. But here, it's a practical matter. [00:26:05] And at the beginning of chapter four, Paul fastens on one aspect of holiness in particular and that is fornication. And he exhorts these new believers in the Lord Jesus to abstain from fornication.

And he goes on to speak about the most serious consequences of not heeding this exhortation.

But what will sustain us in our desire to answer to these verses is the fact that the Lord is coming. And it says in verse 13 that he's coming with all his saints.

[00:27:06] And this coming of the Lord Jesus with all his saints is what ushers in what we call the world to come, whereof we speak.

So that then the measure in which we have been faithful to God and to the Lord Jesus while we have been left in this scene will be made manifest. So here is a tremendous encouragement to us, a tremendous motive for us to maintain holiness in our lives for as long as we are left in this scene.

I read the portions from chapter four and five [00:28:01] and the verses from chapter two of the second epistle because they address two particular difficulties that had arisen amongst the saints at Thessalonica. And the first was the question whether the Lord Jesus is coming for all his saints or not.

And the second is the question whether the saints will be on earth at the time of what is called the day of the Lord.

And these two questions and the way that Paul addresses them [00:29:02] are of vital importance, particularly today, because one ventures to suggest that not a few Christians are in a muddle.

About the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

And we have saints taking all kinds of different positions, having different views in relation to it. And it's a tragedy, an absolute tragedy, because the way that Paul meets these questions, properly understood, leaves no room for any doubt whatsoever [00:30:04] as to what the truth of the matter is.

I said the first question was whether or not the Lord Jesus is coming for all his saints. The question at that time was, well, what would happen to those believers who had died? And some had the notion that those who had died had missed out on the kingdom. We've spoken about the world to come. We sometimes speak about it as the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. We're talking about the fact that he is to reign over the earth for a thousand years. [00:31:05] And some at Thessalonica had the idea that whilst the Lord Jesus was coming for those who were alive and remain at that time, that the resurrection of those that had died in faith was something that would not take place until the end of that 1,000-year reign of the Lord Jesus. But in this they were very much mistaken. And that's precisely what Paul shows us in verses 13 to 18. In verse 13 of chapter 3, we've read that the Lord Jesus is to come [00:32:05] with all his saints.

And the question then arises if that is so, if the Lord Jesus is going to come from heaven with all his saints, and Revelation 19 shows exactly that, how is it that they get there? How is it that they get to be with the Lord when he comes from heaven, with all his saints?

There's some of his saints. Scripture couldn't be plainer. We have it not only at the end of chapter 3, but elsewhere in the verses that we have read. When he comes with all his saints, [00:33:05] he comes with them because he has already come for them.

And 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 13 to the end of the chapter show that coming for them. I don't intend to speak in detail on the verses because time is of the essence.

And generally their content is quite well known. But one might say that in 1 Corinthians 15, we have verses that speak about the raising of the dead [00:34:01] and the changing of the bodies of the living.

And that is something that takes place on earth when the Lord comes again for his own. Here in the second part of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, we go one step further because the dead raised and the living changed, and we go up to meet the Lord in the air.

And so shall we ever be with the Lord. And if we wanted to complete the picture, we could turn to John's Gospel chapter 14 that presents the Lord Jesus as coming for us, [00:35:03] receiving us unto himself, that where he is, there we may be also, in order that we might be with the Lord in the Father's house in heaven.

And this work is all of grace.

Verses 13 to 18 of chapter 4 are the contrast in every possible way with verses 1 to 11 of chapter 5.

You know, by grace we are saved, through faith, and even the faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. And when God undertakes to save us, [00:36:03] he undertakes to save us completely. We have by faith received already the end of that faith, the salvation of our souls, Peter tells us in 1 Peter chapter 1, and the only thing that remains is for that same salvation to touch our bodies. And that's

what's happening in 1 Corinthians 15 and in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

It is all of grace.

And we are taken from the earth, as we have seen, to be with the Lord in heaven. It's the consummation of the work of grace and our responsibility does not enter into it at all. But responsibility is very much part and parcel [00:37:05] of verses 1 to 11 of chapter 5.

Here we are concerned, as the opening verse tells us, with times and with seasons. And immediately we think of times and seasons, we're no longer thinking of heaven, we're thinking of earth.

And chapter 5 verses 1 to 11 is speaking about the day of the law.

And of that day coming as a thief in the night, coming as something wholly unlooked for, wholly unprepared for.

It is a day of judgment, a day of destruction, [00:38:03] as verse 3 tells us.

For when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.

But the Apostle Paul goes on to show the contrast between what their portion will be and what our portion is.

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light and the children of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. And he goes on to speak about the importance of our being watchful and being sober.

[00:39:04] We are to be those who are continually looking for the coming of the Lord.

And we are not to allow ourselves to be spiritually intoxicated in any way.

And this spiritual intoxication, I believe, can be identified with embracing the thoughts of men as if they were the thoughts of God.

There is the wild notion in Christendom that the millennium will arrive [00:40:08] because all the world will be converted.

That through the preaching of the glad tidings, the time will come when the earth is a fit place to which the Lord can return.

But Scripture is dead against any such notion as that and shows that the kingdom, the millennium, will be introduced by judgment.

And that was the question that Paul addressed in the second letter.

Because the Thessalonian saints were suffering.

[00:41:06] They were in tribulation.

And there were those at Thessalonica who were saying, these persecutions that we are enduring, these sufferings that we are enduring are persecutions and sufferings that are connected with the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord has come. That terrible day when God's judgment will be in the earth. And that's why we are suffering these things.

And Paul refutes that idea completely and shows that whilst absolutely nothing [00:42:09] has to happen on earth before the Lord comes again, he shows in the verses that we've read in chapter 2, 1 to 12, that five things have to happen before the day of the Lord will come.

And the very first thing he refers to in chapter 1 is the gathering together of the saints unto the Lord Jesus Christ. He's talking about the rapture.

How can you imagine that the day of the Lord has come [00:43:04] when the saints of God, before that day will break upon this world, the saints of God, every Christian, will have been taken up at the coming of the Lord Jesus for his saints to be with him in heaven.

Be not soon shaken in mind, he says in verse 2, or be troubled neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is present.

The translation should be the word, the underlying Greek word occurs seven times in the New Testament and on every occasion it should be translated present. For example, in Romans chapter 8 [00:44:06] when Paul asks the question can anything separate us from the love of God?

He speaks about things present and he contrasts things present with things to come. And the whole point was that the saints at Thessalonica were thinking that the day of the Lord was present, that they were actually living at that time when God's judgments will be on the earth, but first of all the Lord will come and take his saints to be with him in heaven. Secondly, [00:45:03] verse 6 refers to what withholdeth and now ye know that which restrains that he should be revealed in his own time and there is there is that which keeps in check this progress of evil and will keep it in check until the saints of God are with the Lord, until Christians are with the Lord and then this check, a check which the government of God maintains will be taken away.

He speaks about in verse 7 he who now restrains [00:46:04] until he be taken out of the way and this is a reference to the presence on earth of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit too keeps this evil in check and it is impossible for it to progress to its final stages until the Spirit of God too is taken from this scene as he will be at the coming of the Lord Jesus for his own because the Spirit of God dwells in the saints of God of this dispensation. He dwells in Christians, he dwells in every Christian and then he speaks in [00:47:04] verse 3 about their coming of falling away first and this falling away the word is really apostasy.

Actually I think the apostasy when all belief in God will be abandoned whether by professing Christians or whether by Jews because true Christians have been taken out from the scene those who profess the name of the Lord Jesus but aren't real believers will be the only ones who are left

behind and very quickly there will be a falling away [00:48:02] from all revealed truth and abandoning of every vestige of Judaism on the part of the Jews and Christianity on the part of Christians or professing Christians and this opens the way for the manifestation of the man of sin.

Now my time is running out.

The man of sin that is being referred to is the Antichrist.

He's spoken of in Daniel 11 verses 36 to 39 and what characterizes him is that he does his own will he exalts himself above everything that is divine [00:49:04] and he speaks monstrous words against the God of gods. He is the man.

Man energized by Satan and in him Satan will have what he has always wanted the place of God.

Men will give the Antichrist this place.

He appears in the temple of God in that temple that will have been rebuilt and shows signs and wonders with all power.

[00:50:05] If we were to read the verses about the Antichrist in the second half of Revelation chapter 13 he has horns like a lamb he speaks like a dragon which is to say the horns represent the power that he displays and men will be taken in by this. It's extraordinary, isn't it? And they'll think that this is a proof that he's God's man on earth.

But immediately he speaks.

He shows what is in his heart with gracious words proceeding out of his mouth.

[00:51:06] He speaks like a dragon. He speaks like that old serpent which is the dragon and Satan which is the devil and Satan. I'm not quoting that quite correctly, am I? But the Lord Jesus will deal with him. The Lord shall consume him with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy him with the brightness of his coming which I think is really a quotation from Isaiah chapter 11 the latter part of verse 4.

So there is no question. There is no question firstly that at the coming of the Lord every Christian whether having died [00:52:01] or whether being alive and remaining until that coming will go to be with the Lord Jesus.

And secondly there is no question that the saints of God or any part of the saints of God are going to be left on earth to go through this period this day of the Lord the time of that great tribulation when God's judgments will be in the earth. Well may we be helped today and every day to hold the hope of our Lord's coming for us in our hearts and to find that this gives character to our lives and walk here [00:53:02] to find that this energises our service for the Lord because the Lord is coming and we stand on the very threshold of his coming.

May the Lord help us until he comes. Now my time has come he's gone we won't sing a hymn I fear the ex-bank manager so I'll close in prayer.