

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Advent Week 5—Celebrating the Reigning and Returning King

It's been said that living the Christian life is an endeavor in "ancient-future orienteering". (I'm not entirely sure who first came up with that term, but I like it.) Our faith is founded in history, specifically God's actions in the past, especially at work in the calling of Abraham, the freeing and establishing of Israel, and the bringing of His covenant promises to fruition in Jesus. But our faith is also firmly rooted in the future. In the resurrection of Jesus and the renewing/sanctifying work of the Spirit, the future comes rushing into the present, giving us a foretaste of what is to come.

Faith, by its nature, is founded on fact (i.e. historical events). This is not exclusive to "religious faith". (Remember, faith is just another word for trust.) We trust (or not) based on previous experience (facts). For example, when a couple gets married and pledge their vows to one another, they trust the vows of the other person based on their experience in relationship with that person. Hope, by its nature, is future oriented...the expectation of a positive outcome.

So, we orienteer our present having anchors in both the past and future. We know what God is like and what He wants for us and from us through His actions in the past (most explicitly through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus). We know that He is faithful to His promises, so when Jesus says He's coming back and has a blessed future in store for us, we believe Him. In the meantime, we make our way through life faithfully and loyally (in general terms) loving Him and our neighbor, because this is what He's asked us to do in the here and now. How that specifically gets lived out, and what challenges we face in living faithfully to Jesus, depends greatly on the context we find ourselves in. The challenges Christians in China will face are different than the challenges Christians in Zimbabwe or Venezuela will face, which are different still than the challenges Christians in the United States experience.

The main passages we looked at this past Sunday were from Zephaniah and II Peter. What these two books of the Bible have in common is that they both speak at length about "the Day of the Lord". In one respect they are talking about the same thing, and yet in another respect they're talking about completely different things. I'll try to explain...

The "Day of the Lord", when mentioned in Scripture, refers to times when God intervenes in some way, shape, or form, and acts decisively against His enemies and for those who are faithful and loyal to Him. So, in that sense, Zephaniah and Peter are both drawing their reader's attention to the idea that a time is coming when God is going to act decisively, dramatically, and drastically. But, Zephaniah and Peter are referring to specifically different times/events.

Zephaniah was warning Judah (the Israelites that made up the southern Kingdom of Judah after Israel and Judah divided many years prior) that God was not pleased with them and was about to judge them. (The idea of "judgment" usually goes hand in hand with the idea of "the Day of the Lord".)

Peter, however, is more of an encouraging explanation to the first generation of Christians who were trying to make sense of Jesus' return (or, more specifically, His delay in returning). Zephaniah was written to God's covenant people who were not living faithfully to Him and, in fact, had made themselves His enemies. Zephaniah was warning that a reckoning was coming. Peter, on the other hand, was written to comfort God's people and clear up some confusion. Zephaniah was referring to a "Day of the Lord" that was coming, and in fact did come, when Babylon conquered Judah beginning in 597 BC. Peter was referring to a great and final "Day of the Lord" that is still yet to come.

The prophetic descriptions of the "Day of the Lord" found in Zephaniah (and in other OT prophets) can be disturbing. The idea of God's judgement and wrath is scary stuff. These OT images tend to skew how we view the return of Jesus. It is important to remember that many of the images we have of the "Day of the Lord" and the return of Jesus come from prophetic, poetic, highly symbolic, metaphorical or apocalyptic literature. We need to be very careful how we understand such literature.

Obviously, Peter's words are more relevant to us, as we are still waiting for Jesus' return. But Zephaniah (and the OT as a whole) forms and informs our understanding of God too...we can't ignore it. The most important thing about any of us is our understanding of God, especially what we think God thinks of us. One of the major contributors to our understanding of God is the Bible. So how we read Scripture becomes important. And, let's face it, the Bible is a challenging book. We must always remember that our view of God should be informed by Jesus. Jesus is God's greatest, clearest, revelation of Himself to us. If we want to know what God is like, we look to Jesus. And we need to read and understand Scripture in light of the revelation of Jesus.

But even in the midst of some scary, intense images and prophecies in the Old Testament we catch God's heart toward His people. A particularly precious image comes from Zephaniah 3:17 *"The Lord your God is with you, He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."*

The short of it, when it comes to the "Day of the Lord" and the return of Jesus is that if we are loyal and faithful to Jesus, we have nothing to worry about. But for those who make themselves His enemy, be warned.

Additionally, Peter tells us, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." (II Peter 3:11b-12a) So not only do those who are faithful and loyal to Jesus have nothing to worry about regarding the Day of the Lord, we are called to look forward to it and haste its coming.

So, how do we do that? What does that look like? We worship Jesus. We look to Jesus for our provision and security. We look to Jesus for our identity. We take our cues from Jesus as how we are to live. We incorporate His teachings into our lives as the way we can become the best versions of ourselves. We live in humble unity with fellow followers of Jesus. We seek justice

and love mercy and walk humbly with our God (as the prophet Micah puts it. We joyfully submit to Jesus as our Lord, Savior, Teacher, Friend. We look to Jesus to define right and wrong for us. We get the word out that Jesus is the rightful King of this planet, inviting others to give their allegiance to Him. (We could go on and on describing the Christian life...but you get the idea.)

(If you haven't done so yet, I'd recommend checking out The Bible Project [www.thebibleproject.com](http://www.thebibleproject.com) ) Below are some specific links to relevant videos.

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/day-lord/>

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/zephaniah/>

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/revelation/>

- Q. When you think about the return of Jesus, what thoughts and feelings do you experience?**
- Q. What are some of the ideas and images you were taught, or otherwise picked up along the way, regarding the "Day of the Lord"/the second coming of Jesus?**
- Q. How do we find the proper balance/perspective between not overly fixating upon the return of Jesus, but also not thinking too little of it?**
- Q. What does being faithful and loyal to King Jesus look like as we await His return?**
- Q. What distracts us from living faithfully and loyally to King Jesus?**
- Q. Who or What competes with Jesus in defining right and wrong?**
- Q. Why might keep a Christian from desiring the Lord's return?**
- Q. The ancient Israelites were surprised (perhaps shocked and scandalized) to find out that they, in fact, had become God's enemies. How might Christian/the Church avoid making the same mistake?**
- Q. Who has the most to lose when the Day of the Lord arrives? Who has the most to gain? (Explain)**