**New Hope Sermon – God’s Kingdom Narrative–**

**1st Thessalonians 5:23-24**

**Introduction:**

*“In* November of 2008 one of the greatest masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance was restored to its original splendor and returned to its home at the world renowned gallery in Florence. The Madonna del Cardellino was painted by Raphael in 1505 for the wedding of his friend, a wealthy Florence merchant. It portrays Jesus Christ's mother, Mary, with two children who are playing with a bird. The children symbolized John the Baptist and his young cousin Jesus. The gold finch bird that feeds among thorns is interpreted as representing Christ's future suffering.

But something happened to this painting. Forty years after it was created, there was an earthquake in the house in which this painting was kept, and the painting was shattered into 17 different pieces. The wood was all smashed up into bits. So another artist took long iron nails and tried to patch the pieces together. And then he tried to paint over it to conceal the breaks and make it look whole again. But over the years, there were so many layers of paint added and so much dust and grime over this painting that the original colors, the original art, was completely obscured.

The contemporary restoration project fixed the shattered areas and removed layers of paint and dirt to get the colors back. It was a team effort. It took fifty people ten years of working on this painting, and now the cracks are gone. Centuries of brown film and grime are gone. The dulling veneers and patches have been stripped away, and the finished product glows with all of the deep colors: the reds, and blues, and golds of the original work of art. Given how badly it was damaged, the restoration of Raphael's painting is arguably even more amazing than the painting itself. The original was splendid, but the miracle of restoration compounds the beauty.

The spiritual parallels are profound? They speak to a far greater masterpiece of restoration, the one that the Lord wants to do in your life and in mine. Tragically, the beautiful design of who God created you and me to be has been marred by sin; and layers of grime and dirt have collected. Maybe you've sense that sin and disfigurement in your life. You thought you could paint over the damage, but it didn't work, and the patches, the veneers that you applied just made things worse, and the cracks are showing. Maybe you've even experienced earthquakes that have shattered you, but the good news of the gospel is that Jesus has the power to make all things new.Mary Kassian, from the sermon "[*The Genesis of Gender*](http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/outlines/2012/february/genesisgender.html)" Let’s pray

**Sermon**:

The goal of our journey as Christians is ultimately to be ready to meet Jesus when He comes back or when we die. But it isn‘t a patchwork, fix-up project we strain to do, unsuccessfully, throughout our Christian life. Many of us strive for perfection from day to day. We think this is what God requires. But that shows a grave misunderstanding of the gospel. Our passage today shows us that God is the perfector and He has a plan to make us perfectly restored to His image. How it happens is a matter of knowing His kingdom narrative for the world from its start to its finish. Then we can understand our place in that narrative and God’s place in fulfilling His purposes in our lives. Do you know God’s storyline?

Last weekend I needed some R+R time to put margin in my life from an extra busy couple of weeks of moving furniture around and reorganize the house for the fall. So I went to the library and got “fun” books to read. One story has an intricate plot involving kidnapping, pirates, clan retribution and rich people in London’s society. I’d gotten about halfway through the complexities in the book and then I flipped to the end of the story to see how it all would end. Then, assured of an interesting ending for all involved, I returned to the middle of the story with a sense of peace and coherence and read to the rest of the story – enjoying how the author skillfully wove together all the complex relationships and issues. Ever done that?

This is what God allows us to do as we read the Bible because the whole book is a story of God’s Kingdom narrative –His story in history that has a beginning, middle and end. It started with Genesis and creation. In fact, the whole storyline is in this graphic. *Creation, perfection, design, order.* Then *disconnection and separation* from God through sin. Relationships became complex and story lines of fallen people intertwined to create a very messy, broken world. God chose the Israelites and sent the law and the prophets to help them live God’s story line but they failed and so Christ came and died and then sent the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Christ for salvation so that through the Spirit God’s people can live as lights to demonstrate His redemptive reality in a very dark, fallen world. Note the words *Redemption, rescue, liberation, deliverance*. That is the time we are living in now. Often times as we read of the Charlottesville violence and terrorist attacks and tribal wars and health epidemics, natural disasters, we wonder if God is still in control. But He has told us how the story of humans and planet earth will end. This is the last section with the words “*restitution, restoration, return.*” Jesus Christ IS coming back to reclaim this world, redeem those who love Him and create a new heaven and earth where there is no more sin or sorrow or death or suffering. That’s the end game.

But Christ’s return does seem like a very distant, far-off truth, doesn’t it? You may feel it’s too hard to believe – certainly hard to imagine. So let me start by going over Christ’s second coming and see if we can get our head and our heart around it so it can shape how we live today as God expects and help us understand our text today in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24..

First of all, Jesus’s second coming will form a strong contrast with his first coming. Then, he had been a poor man, despised by religious and secular authorities, and indeed, probably, quite unknown to many people. At his first coming Jesus was “despised and rejected by men” (Isa 53:3), but at the second coming He comes with splendor and majesty; everyone will see him. In His first coming, Jesus was the suffering Servant. In his second coming, Jesus will be the conquering King. [As Revelation states], “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:1-16).

“Right to the end of his life Jesus firmly proclaimed the truth that he will come again. At his examination before Caiaphas he said, “*You will see the Son of Man sitting on the right-hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Mark 14:62). Similarly, Luke reports the words of the angels just prior to his ascension, “*This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:7; Acts 1:10). A bodily resurrection then; a bodily return in the future. And the book of Revelation, the last book in God’s Kingdoim Narrative, ends with Jesus saying “*Behold I am coming soon*” And John the apostle’s words in response, “*Even so, Come Lord Jesus*.” Rev. 22:20

“The second coming of Jesus Christ gives believers the assurance that God is in control of all things, and is faithful to the promises and prophecies in His Word… There are some prophecies regarding the Messiah that Jesus has not yet fulfilled. The second coming of Christ will be the return of Christ to fulfill these remaining prophecies.” (Leon Morris, New Evangelical Handbook).

There are many more things that will happen at His return. These issues of eschatology (the end times) are a sermon in itself, but today I just want us to have this reality as our context for Paul’s words to the Thessalonians and to us. I thes. 5:23-24.

*The Message: May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together - spirit, soul, and body - and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ.*

***24*** *The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!*

These are amazing promises of God’s work in our lives as we live through the sin and brokenness of the world and await the coming of our Lord Jesus. God is the faithful One; he will help us become holy; He will make us whole in body, soul and spirit so we are ready for Christ when he comes. These verses make it clear that He IS coming back to reunite with those who believe in Him and take us to his heavenly home. It is a real destination and a real reunion. He IS coming again. This is the end game of the Kingdom narrative.

Paul, with his pastor’s heart, is praying that the Thessalonians finish well. They were under severe persecution, so their continuance in the faith was not guaranteed. But Paul gives them the promise that it is God, the faithful One, who will keep them and have them ready to meet Jesus.

In Bible Study Fellowship there was a phrase that epitomizes how we were to end the year in that organization – “not somehow, but triumphantly.” The idea was that we not finish by just barely getting by, but that we finish with an ending that shows forth God’s victory and provision of grace. It’s a goal every student could have who is trying to finish his or her work and graduate or complete papers on time or fulfill all the end of the year responsibilities at work – not somehow but triumphantly.

Verse 24 is a promise of hope and confidence – The Lord is faithful; he called you into relationship, into a life purpose and He will hold onto you and perfect you so you can be completely whole – in body, soul and spirit – at His coming. This takes the weight of perfectionism off of us. It is God who will make us complete, perfect, acceptable. We are not that now. We all still have flaws, sin and unresolved emotional issues and surrender issues.

But here’s the good news, beloved. God is the keeping God. This theme is throughout the Bible. Think of the famous Aaronic prayer that the priests were to pray over the people is*: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*” Num6:24-25. The Lord bless you and keep you. Keep us from what? Ps. 19:13 – *keep your servant from willful sins*. Keep us from apostasy - Paul declares *I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him. Keep our mind at peace* when we trust in Him Isa. 26:3. In fact in Jude’s letter is a phrase I don’t remember seeing before: *Jude, to those who are called, who are loved by God the Father and Kept by Jesus Christ. Jude 1.*

We rightly wonder if we will be able to keep the fire of our passion burning; if we will be acceptable to God when Jesus returns; if we bring joy to Him and fulfill His calling on our lives. But the answer is not on our super faith or super strength or resolve. It is in the Lord. We are kept by Jesus Christ. It is all about the Lord. He will get us to the ending with His power and fully transform us at that point.

Throughout his letters to the churches, Paul uses the certainty of the coming of “the day” as a way of motivating believers to be active in the service of their Lord. Jesus makes it clear that his coming will be sudden and unexpected (Matthew 25:13; Luke 12:40, 24:36 & 44) and so calls His followers to watchfulness (Matthew 24:42-51). When the Master returns, there will be an accounting of what people have done with the talents he’s given them. Hence the trumpet call by the angel to be ready.

So, how does Christ’s return affect your living today?

Or, to put it another way, what is your part in God’s story today?

That’s where Jude’s promise is so reassuring: *Now to Him who is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the throne with exceeding joy*. Jude 24. *With exceeding joy – how amazing. Able to keep us from falling. Able to make all grace abound to us so that you always having all sufficiency in all things may abound in every good work. Able to do exceedingly abundantly above everything we could ask or imagine according to the power at work within us.*

In our Christians lives we certainly *“labor struggling with all his energy which God so powerfully works within us.”(Col.1:29).* We chose to *“stand firm, let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” I cor. 15:58* We work hand in hand with God since He is the faithful One who will fulfill all His promises to us. Both now and at Christ’s second coming God’s story is really all about the Lord. What wonderful good news. Let us pray.

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