

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Study Guide

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 9: THE RETURN AND THE RESURRECTION

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Christian Doctrine. This series of lessons examines doctrines which are foundational to our faith, with an emphasis on how incorrect doctrine can negatively impact true faith. Doctrine is the set of beliefs that determine how we practise our faith. It is critical that Christians understand correct doctrine about the nature of God and salvation, especially if they are engaged in teaching and discipling. This module examines scriptures related to a number of core doctrines of the Christian Church, and also some of the areas of confusion and error associated with each doctrine.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other content is © 2019 Trans World Radio Canada, and may be used in any way you like as long as you use it with the purpose of reaching the world for Christ and do not charge for the use of the material. See more license details at www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing.



CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 9: THE RETURN AND THE RESURRECTION

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson looks at the doctrine of the promised return of Jesus Christ to earth, and the subsequent resurrection of the dead.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

We are called to love one another, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, even when someone holds to a different doctrinal position than we do. While some verses of the Bible are plain in what they teach, other verses cause different interpretations within Christianity. There are different interpretations on what is known as the 'end times', or the time when human history comes to an end and God's final work of destroying sin is completed. In this lesson, we will focus on what we know for sure, what is clear in the Scriptures, understanding that there are many passages which have varied interpretations. This topic may require you to do further research and personal study. We have presented here some commonly held positions essential for Christian faith.

GETTING STARTED

1. Have you recently attended a funeral? Who was it for? How did the funeral service honour this person? How should a Christian's funeral be different from an unbeliever's?
2. What is something in your future that you are most excited about? What are you doing now that is helping you prepare for that future?



STUDY

❖ **DEATH IS NOT THE END:** We often live our lives for what is immediately seen, and fill our days with entertainment, employment, food, possessions, pleasures and concerns even with good things like family and community. But we may not regularly mediate on the fact that this world, this life, and this body are only temporary. Christianity gives us hope that life is more than all these things, and that death is certainly not the end. The Gospel message is a testimony to the fact that death, our greatest fear and enemy, has been defeated. There is a world beyond death and the grave, a world to come, a world that will be our eternal home.

- The highest goal of a person is to preserve their own life, but this is not the ultimate goal of the Christian. Our life belongs to Jesus who has already died and risen to eternal life. The Christian is to obey and glorify God, even if it means losing our life (Romans 14:8).
- Life is important, and when we mourn the loss of someone through death, we recognize how precious the gift of life is. We also realize that life is temporary, and can quickly and unexpectedly end. Physical death is a sad result of sin in the world (Romans 5:12).
- God's Word differentiates between physical life and death, and spiritual life and death.
 - Physical death is when the soul is separated from the body.
 - Spiritual death is when the soul is separated from God.
- All of us live in a state of spiritual death until we are given new life when we are saved by Jesus Christ. Just as God is able to defeat spiritual death and restore spiritual life to a soul (which happens when we experience salvation), having defeated physical death, He will restore our souls to a glorified physical body at the resurrection.
- When we experience physical death our soul is separated from the body. But Christians believe that this is not the end, but that our body will be resurrected, be made new, and reunited with our soul.
- When greeting one another, the early Christian Church used the word "Maranatha", an Aramaic word meaning "The Lord is coming". Some communities of Christians proclaim on a regular basis, "Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again." The Christian waits eagerly for Jesus to return and fulfill all that He promised.
- How do we know that there is more beyond this life? The Bible tells us what will happen! Read Hebrews 9:27. What is one thing that happens after death?



- What does 1 Thessalonians 4:13 tell us about the temporary nature of our death? What does this passage liken death to?

- **The Doctrine of the Return and Resurrection can be stated this way: Jesus will return to the earth – visibly, bodily and personally – to complete His plan of salvation. The soul of every Christian who has died will be reunited with their glorified physical body at the resurrection, and those still alive at that time will be changed and receive glorified bodies.**

❖ **THE RETURN OF JESUS:** The Bible reveals God and His plan for us, but it does not give us exact details about every event of the “end times”. However, there are some things we can know for sure about the future.

- What does Jesus tell us about the future? Read 2 Peter 3:10 and Matthew 24:1-51.

Jesus said that He will return to the earth at the end of time. The disciples who saw Jesus ascend physically to heaven heard directly from two angels that Jesus would come back to the earth in the same manner (Acts 1:11). When Jesus returns, it will mark the end of history for those who are still alive, and the end of the waiting period for those who have already died and whose souls are with God. When Jesus returns, salvation for those who belong to Him will be complete.

- **What We Know For Certain:** While the teachings about the return of Jesus indicate that we cannot know everything that is to come, there are some specific things we are told plainly in the Bible. Historically, the Church has believed and taught the following doctrines:

- o **Jesus' return will be unexpected:** While there are some signs given to keep us in a state of expectation, we cannot know the date of Jesus' return (Luke 12:40, Mark 13:32).
- o **Jesus' return will be visible:** His return is not a metaphor of something spiritual. Rather, He will physically return to the earth to complete His purposes (Acts 1:9-11, Revelation 1:7, Matthew 24:27). Everyone will see Jesus return!



- **Jesus' return will be personal:** It is Jesus Himself who will return – not a representative or substitute. It will not be a new and different incarnation of God. Because Jesus is alive and eternal, He will not need to be reborn to come back to earth. Jesus will return in the same way He left (Acts 1:9-11, Jude 1:14-15).
- **Jesus' return will be glorious:** Jesus, while on earth, did not receive the glory He deserved. But when He comes again, He will come *in glory*. Everyone will recognize the honour due to Him (Matthew 24:30, Matthew 16:27, Titus 2:13). Those who have not given Him His due glory will mourn at the time of His return.
- **Jesus will return with countless others:** When Jesus returns, He will not be alone! He will arrive with armies of angels (Jude 1:14), and those who have died believing in Him and have been with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:14). There will be no doubt whether Jesus has returned or not! It will not be a quiet, secretive event.
- **Jesus will return to judge:** When Jesus comes again, He will have authority to judge everyone, as to whether or not they submitted to His authority in their lifetime (Matthew 25:32-33).
- **Jesus will make all things new:** The return of Jesus will begin an era when heaven and earth will be made new. It will be the end of the curse caused by sin, and the beginning of a new life without mourning, pain, or death (2 Peter 3:10-12, Revelation 21:4-5, Revelation 21-22-27).
- **What We Don't Know:** The above is what we know for certain will happen in our future, but there are aspects of Jesus' return that we do not know.
 - **When He Will Return:** Who can know the exact day and hour of the return of Jesus? Read Matthew 24:36, Matthew 24:44 and Acts 1:6-7 and write down your answer.
 - **We don't know which prophecies about His return have been fulfilled:** Jesus said we should watch for times and seasons signaling that the end is near. Since the beginning of the Church, people have discerned that we are living in the end times, so we can see how difficult it is to tell precisely which of these prophecies have been fulfilled. There is some debate about the events in the book of Revelation as to which have already been fulfilled and which are yet to be



fulfilled. But here are some things which must happen first. Read the verse and write down what you learn:

Matthew 24:14	
Matthew 24:23-24	
Matthew 24:29-30	
2 Thessalonians 2:1-10	

- Have you met someone who thought they knew the date of Jesus' return? What made them so sure? Why might someone claim that they have this knowledge?

- Why are we given so little specific information about the return of Jesus?

- Does it make any difference in how you live now knowing that Jesus could return at any moment?

❖ **WE WILL BE RESURRECTED:** All Christians anticipate Jesus' return, and look forward to all the promises He made. One of those promises is the resurrection. When Jesus was killed, it was not the end of His being. He rose from the dead with an immortal and imperishable body, and is



now living in this resurrected body. When Jesus returns, Christians will experience a physical resurrection. Some of the things we know are:

- **Most people will experience physical death:** If we die before Jesus returns, our bodies will decay and our souls will go to be with God. But there will be some who do not face death before the return of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).
- **All people will receive a resurrected body:** Both Christians and non-Christians will be resurrected (restored to life), at which time their souls will be reunited with their physical bodies. Christians will be raised to eternal life, and non-believers to judgement and eternal separation from God (Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29, Matthew 25:31-33, Acts 24:14-15).
- **What will our new body be like?** Our resurrected body will be like Jesus' resurrected body. What was His resurrected body like? Read the verses below and make notes on what you find:

Luke 24:15-16	
Luke 24:39	
Luke 24:42-43	
Luke 24:38-39	
John 20:19-20, Acts 1:9	

We can see from the accounts of Jesus' interactions with His disciples in His resurrected body that it resembled His earthly body, it was physical and could be touched, it ate and drank, it was made of flesh and bones, and it could move in extraordinary ways.

Our bodies, like Jesus' body, will be glorified versions of our old physical body. Our bodies will be eternal, incorruptible and imperishable, and free from disease and disability (1 Corinthians 15:35-39, 42-44, 53-54). They will be both physical and spiritual. Just as our current natural bodies are well suited to life on this earth, our new spiritual bodies will be suited to the world to come.



- **Creation will be made new:** After the resurrection and the events of the end times, heaven and earth will also be remade. The old perishable world will be replaced by an imperishable one. We will live on the new earth, and God will live with us.

Read Revelations 21:1-4, 22-27, 22:1-5. Describe in a few words what the new creation will be like:

- ❖ **LIVING IN PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE:** Knowing that God has promised the return of Jesus, punishment of evil, the ultimate salvation of the Church, resurrection of the dead, and the recreation of the world, how should we live?

- **We are to wait eagerly for Him:** We are to live with expectant hope that the return of Jesus could be at any time. It may be today, or many years from now, but we must prepare ourselves to be ready. We are to watch for Him and diligently do the work He has given us to do (Luke 12:37, 2 Peter 3:11-14).
- **We are to resist deception:** We are told in the end times there will be deception, and people will follow false prophets and those who claim to be Christ (but are not). We must be shrewd, and careful to examine everything in the light of Scripture so that our doctrine is Biblical. Even though these deceptions are predicted, the Holy Spirit will help us to discern the truth. The truth will always line up with God's Word, and will always elevate Jesus Christ (John 16:13-14, Colossians 2:18, Matthew 24:3-14).
- **We are to live with hope:** We know that death is not the end for believers because we have the hope of eternal life with Jesus, and an end to fear, persecution, and oppression. We are to encourage one another, look to the future trusting God to care for us, knowing our tribulations will come to an end (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Corinthians 4:17).
- **We are to preach the Gospel:** Even though we will live for eternity, the work we do on earth still matters! In fact, it matters a great deal! What we know of the world to come should renew our passion for missions and evangelism (Matthew 28:19, Matthew 24:14).
- What is one thing you can change in your life today as you wait in expectation for the future God has promised?



- ❖ **Errors In The Doctrine Of The Return And Resurrection:** Within Christianity there is some disagreement about the exact order of events of the end times. That is okay, because we are not told every detail in Scripture. However, there are some false doctrines and errors that we must avoid:
 - **Error #1 — Belief that Jesus has already come:** Some falsely believe that Jesus has already returned. There are people today who claim to be Jesus; however, they have not fulfilled the prophecies and therefore are false prophets. If someone claims to be the returned Christ, examine their claims against what the Bible says about the return of Jesus!
 - **Error #2 — Belief that Jesus' return will be spiritual:** Some people falsely believe that Jesus' return is only a spiritual matter, or that He 'returns' to our hearts when we become saved. This false belief often arises when someone predicts the day of His return and it doesn't happen.
 - **Error #3 — Belief that because the Lord hasn't come yet, He will not come:** Some people falsely believe that it has been too long, and therefore Jesus will not return. They may suggest that Jesus did not really know whether He would return or not. It has been over 2000 years, but we must remember that God kept His promises for many thousands of years over the course of the Old Testament. God has not forgotten us!
 - **Error #4 — Belief that we become angels or spirits after we die, and will eternally reside in heaven:** Some professing Christians follow their own ideas about the afterlife. A common misconception is that we become angels when we die. The Bible does not indicate this; angels are separate beings. Another common error is that we become spirits and inhabit the earth, or that we eternally reside in spiritual form in heaven. That is not what the Bible teaches.
 - **Error #5 — Belief that Jesus' return is imminent, so we must cease normal living:** If you believe that Jesus will return any day, it may be tempting to make radical changes to your life. We must continue living our life, working, having families, proclaiming the Gospel, and doing the work of the Church as we wait in expectation.
- ❖ **CONCLUSION:** Having an accurate understanding of the things we know about the end times should spur us on to greater devotion to Jesus, greater energy for the work of the Gospel, and greater love for other people. Knowing that this life is temporary, we can put the proper emphasis on the eternal. While it is good to enjoy the life and blessings God has given us, we would do well to regularly contemplate the end of our life and to wait expectantly for the Lord's return!



SUMMARY

- ❖ Death is not the end of our story. While people in general desire to preserve their own life above all things, Christians know that their life belongs to Jesus who already died and has risen to eternal life.
- ❖ At the time of our physical death, our soul is separated from the body.
- ❖ Jesus will return to the earth visibly, bodily, and personally, to complete His plan of salvation.
- ❖ The soul of every Christian who has died will be reunited with their glorified physical body at the resurrection, and those still alive at that time will be changed and receive glorified bodies.
- ❖ Our lives now should be lived in preparation for this future which God has promised. Even though our lives are temporary on earth, we still have meaningful work to do.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can the Church prepare its people for Christ's return?

2. Where do you see false beliefs about the end times? How can you fight against these errors in doctrine? Why is it dangerous to have false beliefs about the end times?