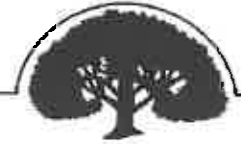


Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Looking Forward Lesson 1
Scripture: Hebrews 6:9 etc.
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: January 4th, 1998

Looking Forward to Your Own Spiritual Growth

Introduction I believe everybody needs something to look forward to. When a person is locked into a lifestyle where they have nothing to look forward to, I think that is about the most depressing state of mind that there is. Everyone needs to have some event, some encounter, some new responsibility or relationship or experience to which they are looking forward. It is called *hopefulness* and in these next four messages I want us to *look forward* together to four things: our own individual spiritual growth; our growth as a church; the spiritual maturity of our children and most dramatically, the second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We need this. We need to have some specific things that we're looking forward to and that we're excited about.

My Personal Outlook I have been walking with Jesus Christ by faith for twenty five, almost twenty six years. In that time I think my faith and my nearness to Christ have grown, somewhat. But I am looking forward to what lies ahead. I think the Lord still has a lot of work to do inside of me. My dependence on Him needs to grow. My confidence in His promises needs to grow. My service to His kingdom needs to consume more of my heart. My speaking of His kingdom out in public needs to become more aggressive. My love for Him more than for the flesh needs to mature more. My love for prayer needs to triple...at least! But getting under a guilt trip about my *deficiencies* is not something the Holy Spirit would create in my head, I do not think. Instead, I believe He wants me to hunger and thirst more after Him. And I look forward to continuing my growth in grace; to exploring His excellencies more and more for the rest of my years. There will be set-backs, I am sure. There will be defeats, temptations, unexpected doubts from time to time. But overall, I am anxious to see what God can YET DO in me, in Neil Damgaard. This is because personal spiritual growth is what the Christian life is all about. The Christian life is not about just filling up your life with more and more activity, reading more books, going to conferences, taking trips, holding church office or even about just accumulating more and more Bible knowledge. All of those are fine things but we do them because they either contribute TO my walk with Christ or because they flow

OUT OF my walk with Christ. The Christian life is about becoming more and more NEAR to Jesus. It is about developing a more personal, *secret*, if you will, relationship with Him. In short, it is about Revelation 3:20 where Jesus said to the Laodicean Christians, ***Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.*** It is hearing His voice, opening the door of your heart to Him and “having a meal with Him!”

But it is not a foregone conclusion that everyone *will* continue to grow in their faith. Some will stall out. Some will plateau. And growth in some will become delayed so badly that they will eventually defect from faith in Christ altogether. I do not claim to understand all that is involved in apostasy, but in three places in the Book of Hebrews those readers are warned about it. One of those three warning passages is in chapter 6. But also in that chapter we have an encouraging verse. After the stern warning in vss. 4-8 the writer encourages his readers by saying, ... ***beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way (vs. 9).***

The Better Things That Are Coming What “better things?” What fruits of spiritual growth yet lie out in the future for me? What evidences can I expect to see that I am walking more closely to Jesus in '98 and '99 than I did in '97 and '96? This isn't just a pep-talk. There need to be some clear milestones, some definite markers that I am closer to Him and that my faith is growing. What might some of those be? The writer to the Hebrews suggests some things that ***accompany salvation***:

1. A hanging-on repentant faith (vss. 6, 12) A hanging-on faith as opposed to ***falling away*** and a repentant faith as opposed to a stagnant belligerence. It is one thing to begin the faith. We invite people to begin to walk with Christ at any time. And everyone needs a starting point. But sometimes just to HANG ON is a big evidence that you are pretty near to him. The inducements to lose one's grip on His hand are pretty intense sometimes. Just *hanging on* is a first marker that I am in His vicinity. Sometimes we jet right on past this very simple truth: those who love Jesus will stick with Him. They will not ***fall away***; they will keep clinging to Him.

And without getting into what the impossibility of renewal to repentance after falling away *means*, notice that there was a state of repentance, a mind-set, a willingness, *before* the falling away occurred. A Christian who is growing is nurturing the *growth* of repentance in his life. When he sees sin in his heart, he grieves it. He wishes to turn from it and he *decides* to turn from it, perhaps numerous times. He changes his mind about things over and over again until the change of mind begins to take root. I look forward to feeling more *hateful* of sin in the future than I yet do, at

least some sins. I look forward to having a more sensitive heart, that is wounded *more easily* by sin.

2. Another milestone for spiritual growth that we can look for and get excited about is the possession by us of *a working love* (vs. 10a). A growing Christian does work in the body of Christ and he or she and shows love toward the name of Christ. What does that mean? In part, it means that we labor and work and we exercise love so that Jesus will be heard about; so that people will see that work and love and give Jesus the credit for it. And it also means, perhaps more directly, that I direct my work and love towards Him. If I do something for the body; if I do some act of love it is because I love HIM and I do it *towards Him* foremost. It isn't always easy to love. God knows that and the text tells us that He notices it—He is a just God—when we labor among people for Him. He notices it when we say “no” to self or to some opportunity the world presents us with in order to say “yes” to Him. He sees it and He counts it.

Our building committee has been working hard for many months. Why? Because of Jesus. Our Awana leaders give every Wednesday evening (when school is in session) and other times too. Why? Because of Jesus. Sometimes someone needs a ride, some food, some clothing and someone in the body extends themselves a little maybe even *inconveniencing* themselves some to meet that need. Why? Because of Jesus. We are connected to twelve people who have deliberately and sacrificially devoted their livelihood to the spread of the good news. We call them missionaries. Why have they done this? Because of Jesus.

A sign of a true Christian, a person who is growing in his or her faith, is a person who **WORKS AT LOVING** their brother and sister in Christ. If none of that is happening; if all a person thinks about is himself and this is a consistent thing there is no basis to believe that he has really met Jesus yet. Being near to Him instills a concern and a growing love for the body.

3. This flows into a ministry to the saints (vs. 10b). There is a **SUSTAINED** working among Christians, not just a temporary attraction to the *novelty* of doing ministry. The writer says that the Hebrew Christians loved by ***having ministered and were still ministering***. The word here for “minister” is *diakoneo* from which we derive our word *deacon* or *deaconess*. A truly Spirit-filled church is not nearly so evident in it's worship service as it is the *rest of the week!*

4. A fourth thing I look forward to getting more of in my own spiritual growth is a diligence (vs. 11). The writer to the Hebrews wanted to see a determination in ALL of his readers and a stick-to-it-ive-ness for Christian living. He was not going to be satisfied with 50% of his readers being diligent in their Christian living. He wasn't satisfied with just *some* diligently pursuing Christ. He desired it for ***each one of you***. Now, I want this for me and I want it for you. I would rather have a church of a

hundred adults who are pretty much all really walking with Christ than a church of a thousand, in which only a hundred are serious about discipleship. I desire that every person who walks through that front door will be motivated to seek Christ diligently with the same kind of passion with which we attack our hobbies, our financial advancement, our entertainment.

The last thing I'm looking forward to is to really **KNOW** that in the end it will all have been worth it. The result, the writer to the Hebrews says is in ***realizing the full assurance of hope until the end*** (vs. 11). The end of what? The end of the age or the end of my life, which ever comes first!

I don't want to look forward to being spiritually *sluggish*. I want to imitate those people I know who stretch their faith and press toward the mark, even though they might even be older people. I am looking forward to being old but alive in Christ. May He inflame us with a determination to grow closer to Him and to ***inherit the promises***.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Looking Forward - Lesson 2
Scripture: Matthew 5:1-3
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: January 11th, 1998

Looking Forward to Our Church's Growth

Introduction I am excited about the future of the church; the future of *this* church and the future of the world-wide Christian church, what we call the *universal* church. The reason I am excited is because I am confident that at the center of the church's future is the Savior, Jesus Christ. And it is hard to *not* be excited about Him. Every time I get back to reading about Him; the things He did, the things He said—in the Gospels, or in the Book of Revelation, my vision of Him gets rejuvenated all over again.

In Matthew 5,6 and 7 we read what is called “the sermon on the mount” which was a talk that Jesus gave to His disciples on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. In that talk He outlined a new outlook; a new way of looking at the future. It was exciting and yet enigmatic, at the same time. The things He said which would characterize *the kingdom of heaven* sounded to them, and to us, very wonderful. But at the same time (especially to them) very elusive and far-off. At this early point in His ministry, maybe the disciples were yet more hungry for Jesus to talk about a “kingdom of earth” where they would become free of Roman occupation and political corruption. Nevertheless, Jesus talked to His disciples on that hillside about the future—a future which would gradually unfold in a sort of *telescopic* way, each generation witnessing a little more of His rule as King until some concluding time and year when He would RETURN and begin to *literally* rule on the whole planet.

What Jesus Did

In 4:23-25 we read about what was happening with His work around Galilee. In vs. 23 we read Matthew's list of Jesus' activities:

1. He was *teaching in their synagogues*.
2. He was *proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom*.
3. He was *healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people*.

Teaching, proclaiming, healing. These were the things that filled Jesus' days. In vs. 24 Matthew enumerates more about it: His actions were benefiting not only those who came themselves for therapy but also people who were *brought*. The range of help went

from *pains* to more dramatic things like *paralysis* and *demon possession*. Jesus was able to cure any disease or hurt, and He did.

Verse 25 records the social result: *great multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan* (which would be from the modern countries of Syria and Jordan). This is not surprising, is it? The public finds out about a great doer-of-good and they flock to Him. Answers to problems, found in and around this carpenter-Rabbi from Nazareth.

Now, what does this all have to do with the future of the church and the future of THIS church? In Matthew 5:3 we have the first of a series of what are called "beatitudes." As Jesus began to teach He said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. What do you think He meant by this? It means that in His kingdom, and among His subjects (wherever they may be assembled) there will be a propagation of blessings and happiness which come from a certain poorness of spirit, or, humility.

The Beatitudes as Vision:

The beatitudes are "forward looking." Jesus was talking about the "inner condition of a follower of Christ and promise him blessings in the future"¹ as well. They are ~~like~~ like a map, of sorts, for the kinds of things we can expect God to do inside of us, if we are seeking Christ:

- Humility
- Sensitivity to sorrow
- Gentleness
- Hunger for righteousness
- Mercy
- Purity
- Peace-making
- Justice for people who have been persecuted because they followed Jesus

These "beatitudes" come from Jesus' own lips and each beatitude really deserves a sermon in itself. But let me tell you now, that I am excited about the future of the church because these are the things that WE are really about, if we keep our focus. We are really nothing more than a group of people who are committed to a kingdom where the rules are really these qualities, where the GOAL is to be like these beatitudes. You could say that a main driving part of our purpose is to BE these things, to TEACH these things, to OFFER an environment where these things are highly valued and esteemed. I believe that these things are the things that people are really *hungry for* and if we can keep it clear that we are about THESE THINGS, we will grow and will not be able to be hindered because we are doing kingdom work. And if you have the king on your side, who can thwart you?

Looking Forward to Whom He Brings

I am not prepared to offer the *discovery*, the *study*, the *realization* of these qualities to just one age-group of people or to just one class of people or to just one race or nationality of people. The body of Christ is made up of whomever the Lord brings us. And it is sometimes surprising whom God brings us. Each newcomer is fascinating to me—when they really end up staying in the body (many come just for a while). Dear ones, I look forward to the growth of the church because I look forward to seeing more and more *new* and interesting people plug into the kingdom of heaven. It is always interesting to see whom God brings us. At the moment, our diversity is here in old and young, worshipping together. Americans and Chinese, worshipping together. Blue collar and white collar, worshipping together. Some with a little wealth and some with virtually nothing at all, worshipping together. Singles, couples, married-but-alone, widows and widowers, college students, all worshipping together. Some of you are sanguine, others are melancholy. Some are phlegmatic and others are choleric. In the body of Christ we are all one under the cross. And really, though we are fascinatingly different, we are all pressing forward for the same purpose.

Looking Forward to a Broader Ministry

I look forward to the growth of our church for other reasons, too. I am looking forward to being able to accomplish things for God with greater resources at our disposal. As our body grows in sheer numbers, we will be able to focus more effectively on youth, on singles, on U. Mass. Dartmouth, on missions. Greater resources in terms of the spiritual gifts which make their home here and in terms of greater financial strength, will mean for us becoming a strong center for the evangelical message, complete with a balanced approach to the Bible. As we grow, we will more and more sense what is important to God, I hope. This Town now needs a place with strength, that understands and teaches the Word of God well, with a well-reasoned and careful style of Bible application.

Looking Forward to Being Blessed by God Because We Focus on His Priorities

I look forward to the growth of our church because I expect God will bless it, if we make worship and prayer and Bible study and fellowship and evangelism our priorities. The stated "purpose of DBC" is to honor God by growing in our relationship with Him and with one another through a balanced focus on worship, fellowship, discipleship and evangelism. In fact, I would like to suggest that we begin a new series of discussions ABOUT each of the above four priorities. The Worship Team could be the group which spearheads the first theme although we may involve some others as well. For those of you whose burden is the development of community and relationships and body-life, you could be part of a discussion group, or even a team of some kind which seeks to better enhance our connectedness with each other, looking for ways to promote fellowship and just *being together* and trying to make sure that no one should be neglected. For those of you whose interest is spiritual formation, you could be part of an organized effort which regularly seeks to promote and encourage discipleship. And finally, there are those in our

midst whose greatest passions lie in getting the good news of Jesus Christ OUT TO others, next door, across town, across the globe and you could put your effort into an evangelism team in our church which seeks to promote evangelism and which explores ways our church can practice evangelism.

Theme:	Worship	Fellowship	Discipleship	Evangelism
Teams:	Worship Team	Small groups	Christian Ed.	Missions
	Helpers	WST	Small groups	Local, individual, training
	Children's Ch.	Events	Prayer ministries	Events
			Youth groups	Literature distribution, web-site

The elders and deacons and deaconesses and trustees would all be supporting these four themes and indeed, already are. They *function* in support of these four themes. I believe that these are the themes that people need to have clear in their heads as to *why we are here*. Everything we do, as Christians, is an expression of worship, either good worship or bad worship. In the process we need fellowship and God intends us to worship *together* in fellowship. As we're worshipping we are learning more and more about personal discipleship, about personally following Jesus. And flowing out of our worship, the fellowship together which we enjoy and our own personal experiences of walking with Jesus, comes evangelism. As I look down the pike maybe there will be additional priorities but right now, these are what we're about and they represent the core of our reason for being together here. Aren't other churches committed to the same themes and priorities? I don't know, perhaps. But we need to know what WE'RE AIMING at and I am excited about seeing us find NEW ways to enhance these four things, which I believe encapsulate the priorities of the New Testament.

Finally, I am excited about the growth of our church because I believe our best days are ahead of us. I want you to love your church; after your own family I want Dartmouth Bible Church to be NO LESS than the best thing in your life! I want you to be excited about what you think God can do here—among those of us who are already here; among our children, who years from now might look back and say, "You know, I was raised in a great church," and among those many people who as yet have not crossed that threshold out there. God can do some great things with us, through us, inside of us and between us. I am looking forward to seeing what those might be!

¹ *The Ryrie Study Bible*, note on Matthew 5:3-12

BALANCING:

- *Worship*
- *Discipleship*
- *fellowship*
- *Evangelism*

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Looking Forward - Lesson 3
Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-12
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: January 18th, 1998

Looking Forward to Our Children's Spiritual Maturity

Introduction Some while ago I conceived of an idea for a short story or maybe a short novel. In my mind the story opens up with a man standing on the steps of this church, at sunset, in something like the year 2040. The church is abandoned, boarded up and that particular evening he has returned to the site of his religious upbringing. The man is divorced and alone, HIV positive, broke and fugitive from the law. He is also a brilliant engineer and in the story (that remains in my head only), the man "flashes back" to his young adulthood, his membership in *this* church and from there the story unfolds about his life, what happened to this congregation, etc. The man is clearly a Christian (in fact, originally, I imagined actually using one of our DBC young men as the character in the story...) This 55-year old man knows the Lord and although very troubled, at this point in his life he has a strong faith in Jesus Christ. He has reached a place of spiritual maturity. Although sick, penniless and in danger of arrest he is experiencing the words of the apostle Paul, *he who is spiritual appraises all things yet he himself is appraised by no man...he has the mind of Christ* and for some time now he has learned to digest *solid food* (1 Corinthians 2:15; 3:1-4). At this point in his life he is no longer driven by ego or the need to identify with this sect or that sect. And in this story-in-my-head, as the "flash back begins" and the man remembers his parents (his "rents" as he used to refer to them), his upbringing in the old DBC Awana clubs, the dinners at church which he and his family used to attend, the way they used to actually play guitars in church (in 2040 no one actually *plays* guitar anymore—everything is electronic). He sits there on the church steps for a few moments and remembers how the youth group died in the church and how that was the beginning of the end for the church. He remembers being bewildered as a high school student and being confused because although he liked *going to* church well-enough he had experienced a growing feeling that church-life just couldn't compete with the *pleasures*, intellectual and physical—of the world, particularly as he went off the college. It was in college, actually, that his faith had seemed to go to sleep for a number of years, even though he kept up with how things were at church through checking in once in a while with their web site. And it was while he was in college that the church had grown sick and then died. By 2040 it is long dead, although the 1968 building remains, abandoned, boarded up. On those steps that evening, looking over his shoulder because he is a wanted man, he senses God calling to him. As I say, he has made his way back to the

Lord for some time now and although he cannot be sure how much time he has left he senses the Lord telling him—“*do you love Me? Shepherd my sheep.*” And the tale unfolds (in my head) that this man finds someone else whom he knew when he was young and together they re-start the congregation along with other new characters in the story.

If there is one passion that comes up most often in our lives, one dream that so many of us share; a thing which comes up in prayer most often in prayer request time—it is that our children will reach adulthood and possess a mature faith in Jesus Christ. Perhaps the greatest desire of our hearts—greater, I believe, than our desire to reach the lost—is to know that each of our children owns Jesus Christ at the center of their lives, that whatever they are doing professionally, however successful they end up being, they are serving Him first and foremost. Maybe the thing we long for more than anything else is to know that whatever happens to *me*, the gospel and the testimony of the Word of God will be perpetuated in the hearts of MY children in the next century. We understand that God can and *will* sovereignly raise up new Christians from out of non-Christian upbringings too. But I apply 1 Corinthians 13:11 to MY kid, *When I was a child used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man I did away with childish things.* and we pray that he or she will become that. Because I sense that this is perhaps our greatest prayer request I anticipate no problem with attendance this go-around with our week-of-prayer, since this is the theme for prayer this week.

My desire is for my children to reach a place of spiritual maturity as soon as possible. Does that mean I think they will become perfect? Of course not. But the Bible teaches that this is what we are aiming for—God wants us to come to a place where we are not *immature*. It isn't supposed to be a RARE thing when a person reaches spiritual maturity; it is supposed to be the NORMAL thing. Now, what does spiritual maturity LOOK LIKE?

In general terms we are talking about a person who first of all, has experienced a clear conversion to Jesus Christ. There is no doubt in *their* mind that they have been born again and that when they die they are going to heaven. End of discussion. Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain—He washed it white as snow. Period.

Second, spiritual maturity looks like this: age-independent. In other words a person may be young, say in their twenties, and really be in the center of God's will, really have pretty good discernment, really want to know God's plan for their life—even though they haven't really experienced much of life yet. And, I would submit that this is the best condition to be in which TO experience life! On the other hand, a person might be a senior citizen, and a Christian, but still be a spiritual babe in Christ because they have never grown very much. Reaching a *condition* of being spiritually full-grown can happen early and *should happen* early.

Third, a spiritually mature person—whatever their nationality or age—DOES certain things as part of their life-style: they access the Word of God and they love the Word of

God; they are plugged in to SOME kind of Christian fellowship and they are committed to it, and as part of that they KNOW what their spiritual gift is and they use it. They make prayer a part of their lives and they are ever interested in learning how to make prayer *more* a part of their lives. They sense that the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20) applies to THEM. And finally, they hunger to be more like Jesus. A spiritually mature person is more interested in HIM and in glorifying HIM than they are in themselves.

Now, in our church we have people at all levels. We have people that are spiritually mature. We have others who have known the Lord for a long time but have never yet reached spiritual maturity. We have some who are just starting out. We have some who have been growing for a little while. And we have some who probably have not yet been born again. We have all levels but our goal is to bring everyone to a place of being grown up in Christ.

Now, back to our children... What are the qualities to PRAY FOR in our children and what are to things to emphasize (other than what we've already said?) In Proverbs 3 we have a nice road map for some of the checkpoints on the road to maturity. In fact, you will notice that in verse 1 we read, ***My son, do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments.*** This is a father speaking to his son. The road map is being handed from parent to child. The kid GETS SOMETHING out of this, if he will choose to adhere to these principles. Notice too, that there is communication between father and child. Maybe this is one of the biggest failures of parents today and why our kids don't really get it—we, the parents, are failing in our communication. But the checkpoints are:

1. A personal commitment to ***kindness and truth*** (verse 3). Spiritual maturity flows through the double-conduit of practicing love, affection and sympathy, and an understanding of what is right and what is not. A young person will grow in the Lord if they make the personal decision to develop kindness and to develop understanding. And again, there is personal benefit to the kid: ***finding favor and good repute in the sight of God and man*** (verse 4). A kid who is moving towards spiritual maturity WANTS peer approval but he also wants GOD approval. If he practices kindness and also understands truth he will experience it.
2. A second checkpoint on the map—a thing we long for our children to possess--There is a willingness in a spiritually mature person to turn things over to Christ, as they come up (vss. 5,6) I LOOK FORWARD to my daughters possessing this. As issues in their lives arise, I desire them to ***trust in the Lord with all their hearts*** and to not place their confidence first, in their own ability to always figure things out. A spiritually mature person brings God into the picture early. And again, there is a promise: ***and He shall make your paths straight.*** You know the thing about a not-straight path? You can't see around the bend. But on a straight path, you know what's up ahead. A young person who gives things over to the Lord and brings Him into their decision-making, grows in their faith! I long for this for my children and I know YOU are looking forward to your children making it a HABIT to make Proverbs 3:5,6 the RULE of living.

3. Third, there is a humility in the spiritually mature person (vss. 7,8). And the blessing is a sense of healing and spiritual wellness! The opposite is to be sickly and weary. I know young people who look old. The person who is ***wise in his own eyes*** and who does not ***turn away from evil*** gets old, early. It wears them out. I look forward to my children being YOUNG, though spiritually mature. And they will have a YOUNGNESS, a vitality, a happiness about them if they DO turn away from evil and if they DO learn to ***fear the Lord***.
4. A fourth checkpoint is to ***honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce*** (verse 9). The promise from God is that for the person who does this, they will always be blessed—they will always have enough. If we want our children to reach spiritual maturity, are they seeing this in us? A spiritually mature person gives back to God, cheerfully, systematically and sacrificially. Having plugged the fear of the Lord into his or her life, having placed Jesus Christ on the throne of his life, he WANTS to do the King an honor by giving Him a gift out of the FIRST BASKET of harvest. Most of us do not harvest, literally (except perhaps for fun). But most of us DO receive a paycheck regularly. Do we honor God from every paycheck, because we love Him? Do our kids see this? Or do we hold back? Do we say, "no, the Lord knows I can't afford to give back to Him." If we want our children to reach spiritual maturity, Proverbs 3 indicates we will visit this checkpoint on the road TO that maturity.
5. The last checkpoint we want to mention today has to do with sensing divine discipline in our lives. Now, I really think we are a whiny generation. We think every hardship we might experience has some evil or martyr explanation attached to it. But a spiritually mature person understands that he needs to receive ***the discipline of the Lord***. I think most of our senior highs at this point probably have no idea yet what this is (let alone our Junior Highs). But they probably know what the discipline of their OWN father is. And if they are to reach spiritual maturity they need to become aware that our Heavenly Father deals with His children in correction and discipline sometimes, too. That is because He cares about us and the writer of the Proverbs says He ***delights in His son***. If I didn't like my own children, or if I didn't particularly care about them, I wouldn't correct them. But because they are the coolest things around (to me), I want them to learn the RIGHT way to go and I want them to learn to SENSE when God is dealing with them, directly. Sometimes I think we are so quick to protect our children that we, in effect, SHIELD them from God's discipline. We want them to have it easy. We don't want them to feel His discipline—but that is what they need if they are to reach spiritual maturity in their OWN walk with Christ.

Let me say that I believe every one of our children in this church is capable of not only reaching spiritual maturity but can go FURTHER than we're gone with our faith. We need to pray to that end. We need to have young people's programs that are the best around! We need to teach our kids in Sunday School what I means to walk with Jesus Christ and not just tell Bible stories over and over again. We need to pass ON to them the excellencies of walking with the living God. They will make their own decisions, to be sure. But we need to give them every chance and every opportunity to find God's fullest plan for their lives and to get right into the CENTER of His will!

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Looking Forward - Lesson 4
Scripture: various
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: January 25th, 1998

Looking Forward to The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Introduction What does the future hold for you? Is it going to be good, not good, or do you feel that it cannot be predicted and you've gotta just go with "how the chips fall?" The study of "end times" is called by theologians *eschatology*. It is called by some Christians the "reason for living." Today we conclude this brief series of messages with the question I posed three weeks ago—what is something you are looking forward to? Everybody needs something to look forward to...and as our world seems to be becoming more and more cynical, any hopefulness for the future is going to need to be anchored in eschatology.

Yesterday I was in a bookshop in the college town of Northampton, which I was told by a woman in the town is the lesbian capital of the East. Ironically, Northampton is also the town where Jonathan Edwards ministered for twenty three years. The "spiritual" section of the bookshop we were in had nothing about Jesus on the shelves but many titles about "joy and ascension," Buddhist thought, karma and spiritualrealism (one word). In this bookshop, I quickly became aware of how silly my beliefs about the future would seem to almost anyone in there. Our evangelical belief in *any* eschatology—our belief that there is a *design* and *plan* and an *ordered end* to history—would make us seem strange in the eyes of many unbelievers today. I'm sure you understand that to non-Christians, this hope of ours in the coming-again of Jesus is pretty laughable. They evaluate it variously as

fantasy (not to be take any more seriously than *Star Trek*); or perhaps as **hallucinogenic** (to be understood as sadly narcotic in its origins); as **therapeutic** (Christians *need* this doctrine); or worse, as **evil** (Christians *have* invented this doctrine out of their bigotry). The fact that we do not think that life is just *cyclical* puts us out of the mainstream right now with most of the world's population. Now, I take comfort in the fact that none of these objections to our belief in the second coming of Christ is *new*. In essence these are the same accusations that Christians who anxiously awaited Christ in the second century had to endure. And even among us evangelical Christians there are those who *downplay* the second coming of Christ. One major scheme of interpretation held by a significant number of genuine Christians, is that most of the Book of Revelation happened all the way back in the first

century. For myself, I am futurist about the Book of Revelation. I don't think *any* of it (other than the seven letters to the churches) has happened yet.

Of course our belief that Jesus is literally coming back to Planet Earth is not wholly dependent on the Book of Revelation, anyway. Jesus spoke about it, as did Peter and Paul. It is a biblical doctrine, if you take the Bible at face value and interpret it in a normal fashion, which we try to do. Personally, I have loved this doctrine ever since the summer of 1972 when I first read Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Lindsey talked about the second coming of Jesus Christ as if it were actually going to happen! He got me all excited about it—to the point, in fact, that I began to ask “how come I never heard of this before?” I was overwhelmed by the Bible's description of how when Jesus comes back there will be no argument with Him at all. Oh, there will be a great army of men (maybe women too) *assembled* against Him, I believe, on a huge plain that I saw in Israel. And I've no doubt that army will be equipped with lots of cool military gear with neat radars and high explosive armor piercing ordinance and Mach 3 aircraft and so forth. Nevertheless, when Jesus touches down, forget about it. Notice the matter of fact and somewhat blunt words in Revelation 19:19 ***And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army.*** Verse 20 then begins, ***And the beast was seized...*** and verse 21 simply reads, ***And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.*** This will be no Super Bowl; it's going to be a “Supper Bowl” (in fact, that's exactly how it is described back in verse 17).

And I am foolish enough to really believe that it's going to actually be just like what the apostle John saw: Real Jesus, waging righteous war, riding a white horse (so, by the way, let there be no mistake that there are animals in heaven, at least one anyway). Now I've got to say with no hesitation, I'm looking forward to this. It isn't that I hate this life and it isn't that I personally, have endured some holocaust and I need a lot of personal justice paid back to me. It's just that I'm looking forward to being there (way back in the ranks some place) and I really think I'm *gonna* be there! I really think that. That means that whatever nasty and bad things might and could happen to me *here*, I'm still going to be **THERE**.

Now, I don't know how much of **HERE** I'm gonna remember when I'm **THERE**. Maybe little to none of it; maybe all of it. But whatever things I think are important now, I'm sure, will at best only be in the back of my mind then.

But before we think that this is going to be “cool,” let me warn you: it's not going to be pretty. And I don't think it's going to smell nice, either. The defeat and judicial finality of the enemy will be total, devastating and gruesome. It will be 100% just but it will be gruesome. However, it will also be *glorious*. And in chapter 20 we learn that two things immediately happen: 1) Satan is bound and 2) the saints reign with Jesus for a thousand years. I'm sure that means a literal thousand years, because I see no compelling reason

to think that it should mean anything other than that. Now, are you a saint? If you are not then you aren't going to be there.

But if you are then the things we are reading about are *your* future. No kidding. Whatever else is in your immediate future, this is in your future too. And I'm here to tell you that I'm looking forward to it. And I have reasons:

1. I'm looking forward to the second coming of Jesus because it will be the complete and total expression of world justice. There will be no unsolved crime, no unresolved border dispute, no inequity of resources after that day.
2. I'm looking forward to the second coming also because it will mean the end of free-wheeling evil. It is not the absolute end of evil itself because the devil will again be loosed for a short while at the end of the thousand years. But the days of permeating, unrestrained and strong evil are gone. Jesus will deal with the devil once and for all at that time.
3. I'm looking forward to the second coming of Jesus also because I want to be with Him. Now, I will be with Him when I die or if the rapture occurs before that I will be with Him then. But I am looking forward to being with Jesus when He sets everything right on the planet. It will make being at a Super Bowl or at a Presidential inauguration or at a major world battle seem like a tiny thing. I look forward to the spectacle of that quiet moment (perhaps) with Faithful and True on His charger—standing before the tanks and personnel carriers and rocket launchers and attack helicopters and also myriad's of mounted soldiers. Them against Him... It will (maybe) be quiet for a moment, wind in His hair, eyes aflame. His blood-dipped robe whips and His banner which says ***The Word of God*** snaps in the breeze. And then they will ATTACK, and the ***sword which came from His mouth*** mows them down. I'm sorry dear ones, call it blood-thirstiness but I want to see that.
4. And I'm looking forward to that day because I believe that somehow we will be reunited with all the saints of history. And the best of the saints, will be as the least of the saints, all one army. This family will be clothed somehow in their own ***righteous acts*** and the clothing on battle-day will look like fine linen, ***bright and clean***. Distinctions between us will seem profoundly unimportant, so overwhelmed will we feel with the joint privilege of being there together on that day and on the side of Faithful and True.
5. A final reason I am looking forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ is because it has some motivation for me NOW. Peter said it: ***Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming day of God... Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found of Him in peace, spotless and blameless (2 Peter 3:11,12,14)***. If I understand Peter correctly, he is suggesting that the godlier we live the closer the day of the Lord can be made. I don't know, that blows my mind! I am looking forward to His coming. Let us make living for Him, living like Him and ***looking for the blessed hope*** our greatest passions.