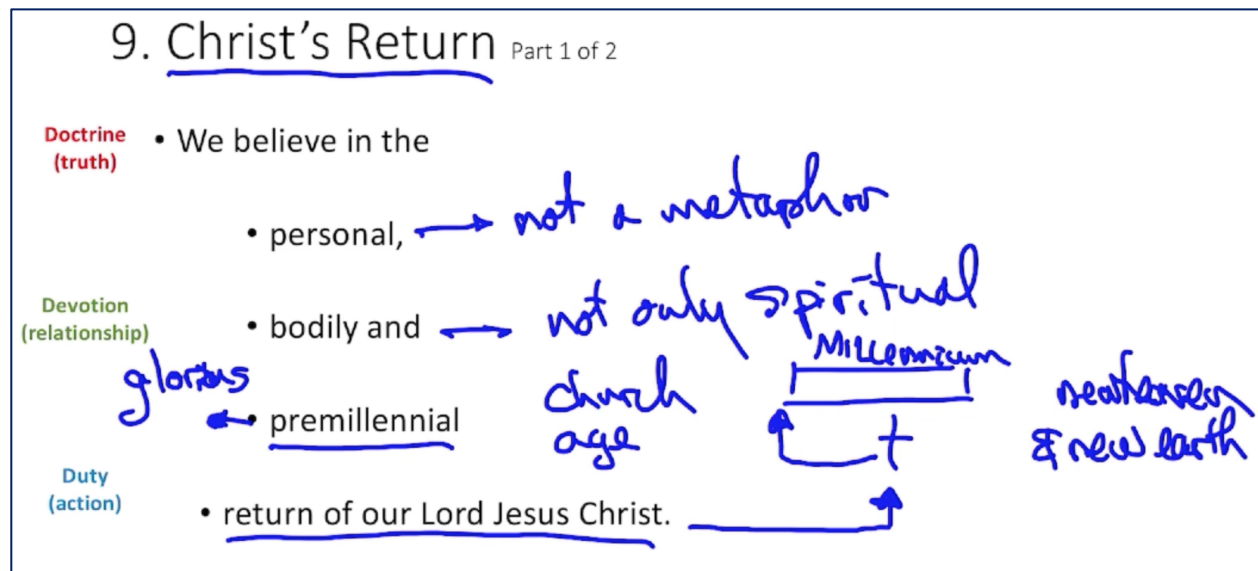


## Doctrine 9: Christ's Return



So we come now to the point in our doctrinal statement where we believe in Christ's return. So put it simply, we believe in **the return of our Lord Jesus Christ**. At present, in some sense He is away from us. Spiritually, He is present, yet physically, He is gone. He is not tangible. He's not visible to us in general. So we believe there's a day when He will return.

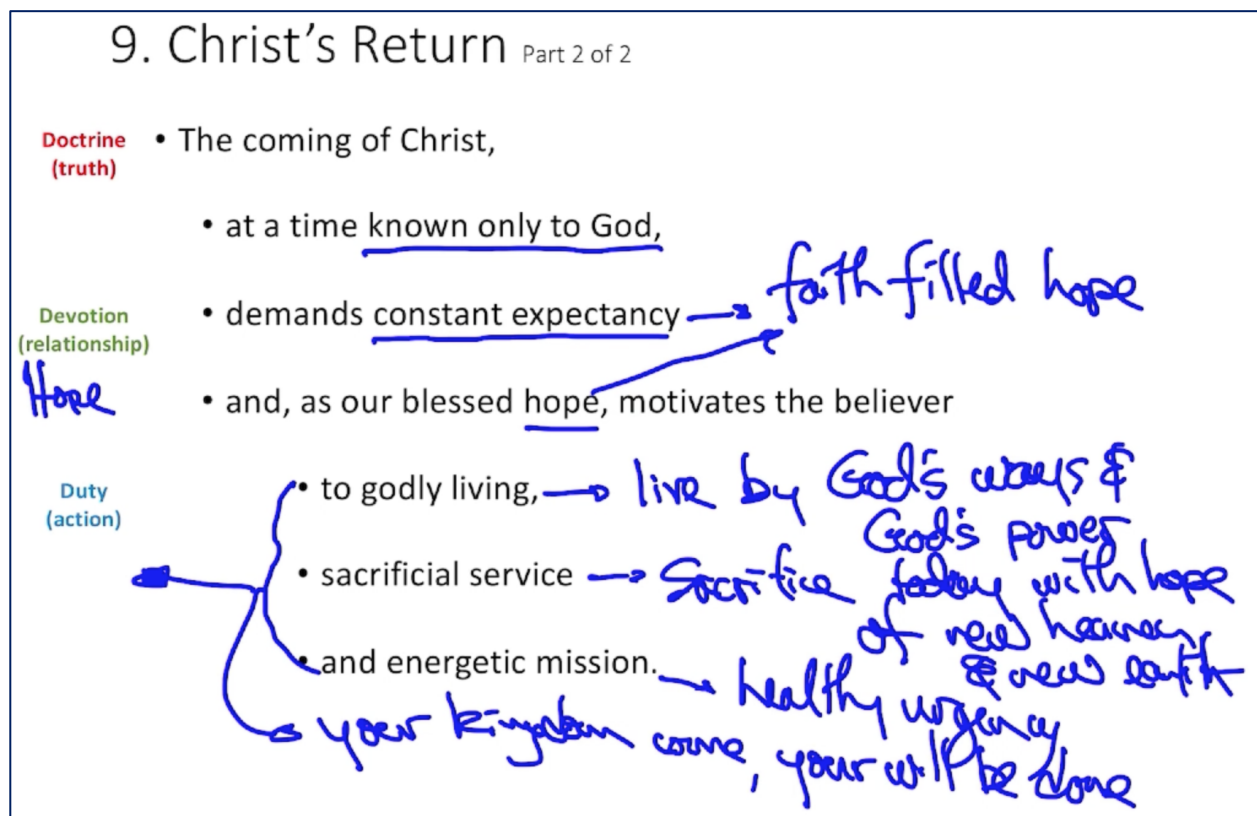
And a few things about this return: we believe that it is **personal**, so this is not a metaphor. It is **bodily**, and so it's not only spiritual. We believe that Jesus the Son of God became a human being. He became human. He had the name Jesus given to Him, and He is human forever. And so He will come back with a body, personally. And He will be visible with our senses, and we can experience Him. So we believe He returns.

Then the statement: we believe in the **premillennial return**. To understand that here is a simplified version of thinking about the future that we have. We currently live in what is termed as the "church age", the time when there is a gathering, there is a presence of God's people in the midst of those who are not God's people, in the midst of powers that are in opposition to God. There is a day in the future when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and in that day all opposition to God will be contained. There will be no more sin or sorrow, no more sickness and death. And that is an amazing day that is coming! As a part of that, we believe in the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, that will initiate that new age, and so there is the return of Christ. That's what everybody agrees on.

What there are big differences about, there are a number of things, but one of the key things that's a major difference is something referred to in the Bible as the Millennium. And this is literally "a thousand years" And there's discussion as to whether or not it is a literal thousand years, if it's symbolic, if it's something that doesn't have a confined period of time. There are very different ways to look at it. "Premillennial" means that there's a belief that the return of Christ will initiate this thousand year period of time, when there is a tremendous goodness that

comes in the reign of Christ and His people, yet evil will not yet have been fully addressed and fully contained. And so then that will happen at the end of the millennium. That is the stance of the Evangelical Free Church.

Yet many in the Church of the world as well as some of the Evangelical Free Church do you see it differently from that. There is an active conversation in the Evangelical Free Church right now, and its outcome is not yet known, of changing the word "premillennial" to "glorious", to say that there is a wonderful, glorious return of Christ that is coming, and yet leave open as to when that will take place. And we as a church are expressing openness to membership of those who would prefer the word glorious instead of premillennial. What is clear is that we have this conviction of the return of Christ, which will initiate this new heaven and this new earth, something for which we long.



And there's many things about this return that, to us, are a mystery. And so that takes us to our second part of what we believe about this coming of Christ. Fundamentally, we believe that it is **at a time known only to God**. Jesus said when he was on earth that He didn't even know, as He chose to take down the limitations of living as a human in that time. Today, we don't know. Many people have made claims, as Christians, about a particular date or a particular year, or a particular generation. We say we don't know. Only God knows when that will actually be.

Yet there's an unhealthy way to live in that uncertainty, and that is that we might say, "Well, since we don't know, we don't need to be actively thinking about it." But we believe that the

reality of His return **demand a constant expectancy**. And an image to me that's very helpful is, if you know the story of the father of the Prodigal Son, it seems that each day, he was hoping today would be the day that his son would come home. And he would go and he'd watch down the road. Yet he would live his responsibilities. And we should similarly live with a faith-filled hope, that this is something for which we long, yet we don't know when it'll be. And so we live with this hope. And we live wisely given that it might not be today. So we still do prepare for the future. We still act in ways that are wise given the uncertainty. This hope that we have, and this is not merely a hope that we think will someday come, it's one that we have confidence in, so it's faith-filled.

It **motivates** us. And it motivates to **godly living**, to live by God's ways by God's power, knowing that the world as we know it will not last forever, that the forces that are in opposition to Him will not be in control forever. So we live looking forward to His ways and we pursue those ways now.

We live with **sacrificial service**, and so we sacrifice today with the hope of tomorrow. And this hope of tomorrow is the hope of the new heaven and the new earth. We live believing that there are sacrifices that we make today that will bring the good that we long to see.

And we live in **energetic mission**, a healthy kind of urgency, that we say, "This is a time when we can be active in doing work, that now is the time for this work to happen."

And it's a healthy urgency. It's not an urgency in being anxious about whether or not we'll get it right or do enough. It's also not a kind of urgency that says, "Maybe we shouldn't sleep at all, because so much has to be done so quickly." It's a confident urgency in the work of God.

And these things together, one way to understand it, is that these are the expression in the Lord's Prayer of "Your kingdom come." And so we want the return of Christ. We want His kingdom to be here, and in that we also say, "Your will be done." And so it is an obedience that acts today leading toward the hope that is ours.

So in this, in the hope of the return, our **devotion**, our relationship, is hope, that we have the hope of Christ's return, the hope of the one we love and who loves us so deeply. We will enjoy His presence. And so we live with an active hope, longing for that day.

And we do live in **duty** of saying, "There are ways that we are to live today with this expectancy that honor Him, that are pursuing His ways." And so out of this hope we are motivated to live in a way that is pleasing to Him and is consistent with the kingdom that is coming.