



# Links Players

## 'WHAT'S NEXT?'

*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God... (1 Thessalonians 4:16, NIV)*

**I**S YOUR CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY OVER YET? Take a look around your house or office. Are the decorations still up? Do you still have carols playing? You're probably not the guilty one, but if you take a walk around your neighborhood on Masters weekend in April, you'll likely find a house with lights still spanning the eaves. For the many people who wish Christmas would just go away, there are others who can't seem to figure out how to *put* it away.

In Western culture, we're not much for lingering. Even though the liturgical 12 days of Christmas lead us purposefully to Epiphany (which was only this past Monday), most of us are ready to move on once we've slept off all those extra desserts. By December 26, our cultural "Christmas season" of shopping and partying and stretching out the gatherings with extended family sends our tired spirits one strong message: Let's move on!

This phenomenon is not only a Christmas thing, you know. Rest gets little play in the West, especially in the United States, where we are notoriously "undervacationed" compared to our European friends and our bosses—even when we are in charge—can always find another project for us to do. Even our kids want to know, "What's next?" We're too quickly satisfied and too soon bored.

In his book, *Ordinary*, theologian Michael Horton examines how the church gets caught up in this thinking as well. Church leaders want to move us to "radical" when we're having trouble keeping up with the "regular." If you want to know the next big thing on God's docket, Horton says, look here: the return of Jesus Christ.

Discussing the return of Jesus makes people nervous. Aren't there several ideas about the *when* and *how* of all this, and haven't these ideas led to good people arguing and good churches splitting? Yes. But what if we remind ourselves not to look at the *when* or the *how*, but to the *who*? Just like at Christmas, if we can keep our eyes on Jesus first, we'll see everything else properly.

This year, when you're walking the block and see that late string of lights or tree in the window, don't get to fussing about your neighbor's procrastination or laziness. Consider instead that our first job isn't to hustle to what's next, but to wait expectantly for what's coming—the glorious return of our Savior!

**Opening questions** Is there something you're eager to put behind you right now? What are you itching to do instead?

**READING** Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Thess. 5:1-6 & Matt. 25:1-13

### There and back again (Acts 1)

How was Jesus' ascension coupled with the announcement of his return? What value does this passage have when we hear doubters say that the return of Jesus was an invention of the apostles or the later church?

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### The thrill of the wait (1 Thessalonians 4)

What tone comes through in Paul's writing this passage? What is promised in this passage? How does reminding one another of Christ's return encourage us (v. 18)?

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### Ever ready (1 Thessalonians 5 & Matthew 25)

How do these passages strike a similar theme of readiness? What might we do to increase our ready attention to Christ's return?

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