

## TRIBULATION

- A. Introduction: Hello everyone! We're once again livestreaming from our home because we're still under the stay-at-home orders due to the corona virus pandemic. We are using these sessions to talk about what is happening and why. Our goal is to mitigate people's fears and increase our faith and trust in God.
1. Jesus Christ is coming back to this world in the not too distant future. He told His followers that His return will be preceded by certain signs, some of which He compared to birth pains. Matt 24:6-8
    - a. This pandemic is a birth pang. Like labor pains, it will come to an end, but there will be other more intense pains. Jesus told His followers that when these things begin to happen we are to be elated in joyous expectation. Luke 21:28
    - b. Many Christians aren't that excited about Jesus' return because they don't understand what it's all about. The second coming is the culmination of God's plan of redemption—His plan to deliver all who come to Him from bondage to sin, corruption, and death, and make them His family.
      1. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay for sin by dying on the Cross. Through His sacrifice He opened the way for men and women to become sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. John 1:12
      2. Jesus will come again to cleanse the earth of all corruption and death and restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family, in what the Bible calls the new earth. Isa 65:17
  2. The second coming is a very large topic (more than we can deal with now). It involves a number of events that take place over a period of time before culminating in the new earth. We made the point last week that there are two big phases or stages to the second coming of Jesus separated by seven years.
    - a. In stage one Jesus won't come all the way to earth. He will come in the clouds and only His followers will see Him. He will take all who believe on Him off the earth and back to Heaven. I Thess 4:13-18
      1. Once believers are removed from earth, a seven year long period commonly known as the tribulation will begin. It will be a time of great suffering, especially the last half.
      2. Matt 24:21-22—For that will be a time of greater horror than anything the world has ever seen or will ever see again. In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, the entire human race will be destroyed. (NLT)
    - b. At the end of this period Jesus will come from Heaven all the way to earth in stage two, bring an end to the tribulation, and begin the process of restoring earth. Matt 24:30
  3. Tonight, I want to address why there will be a time of great tribulation and what it means for us right now as we see these birth pangs coming on the earth.
- B. Before we can talk about those final seven years of human history in this present age, we must go back to the beginning. We could do hours of teaching on this but consider a brief summary in connection with our topic.
1. Before God created the world, He created hosts of angelic beings. In prehistory there arose angelic opposition to God's rule and a rebellion occurred. Ezek 28:1-19; Isa 14:12-14
    - a. Lucifer (an archangel who is now known as Satan) challenged God's right to rule and lured many angels to join him in rebellion. Satan set up his own counterfeit kingdom in the unseen realm.
    - b. After God created this earth, Satan enticed Adam and Eve to join him in rebellion against the Lord, and Satan's kingdom was established on earth. Adam and man in Adam became subjects of the kingdom of Satan. Gen 3:1-6; Luke 4:6; II Cor 4:6
    - c. Gen 3:15—Immediately following Adam's sin, God promised the coming of the Redeemer (Jesus) who would break the power of the devil and execute judgment on Satan. To bruise Satan's head means to destroy his power and lordship over mankind and turn men from Satan to God.
      1. Satan was judged at the Cross but he has not yet been subjugated (made subservient). Jesus is

- coming back to earth to bring an end to rebellion that occurred in the heavenlies before time began. At that time He will bring all things under the rule of His Father. I Cor 15:24
2. Once the counterfeit kingdom is removed God will establish His visible eternal kingdom on the new earth, and He and His family of sons and daughters will live here forever. Life will finally be what it was always supposed to be—no more tears, sorrow, pain, or death. Rev 21:4
  - d. Possibly you're thinking—I'm not sure I believe any of that. Jesus believed it. He referred to the devil as the prince of this world whom He will cast out. Devils recognized Jesus and asked if He had come to torment them before the time. Matt 8:28-29; John 12:31; etc.
  2. Much the destruction on earth in these final seven years will be the result of Satan's increased activity because he knows his time is short. He will attempt to hold onto his counterfeit kingdom. Rev 12:12
    - a. Satan will offer the world a final ruler, his counterfeit of Jesus (Antichrist). This Satan inspired and empowered man will seem to have answers to the world's problems and offer the world a false peace.
      1. Through this man Satan will entice the world to worship and submit to him and help him hold onto his kingdom on earth. He will bring the world to battle at Armageddon and try to prevent the return of Jesus the rightful King. Rev 16:16; 17:13-14; 19:19
      2. Satan tried to stop Jesus' first coming (Matt 2:16; Luke 22:3; Acts 2:23). He has tried through the centuries to work through a man to take over the world and set up world a religion and government (Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin). But he has been restrained until the time of the end.
    - b. The actions of this man of sin (II Thess 2:3) and the responses of the people of earth to him will cause much destruction in these years. Through peace this man will destroy many (Dan 8:25).
      1. When believers are removed from earth in stage one of Jesus' second coming, prior to this period of tribulation, the Holy Spirit's ministry will change. The restraint He exercised on evil through the Church will cease (II Thess 2:6-7). Satan's wickedness and the wickedness in human hearts will be demonstrated as never before.
      2. According to the Book of Revelation there will be nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare, and millions will suffer and die. Revelation is an eyewitness account of the events of these final seven years given to John the apostle by Jesus in a vision (AD 95-96).
    - c. One point before we go on—God is not the source of the suffering in these years. Yes, in the Book of Revelation the events that occur on earth are connected to Jesus opening seals on a scroll. Rev 6
      1. But it's not because God initiates or causes the suffering. It's to make it clear that the calamity is the result of people rejecting God.
      2. God judges people by giving them over to the consequences of the choices they make (lots of lessons for another day). Rejecting God produces death. Rom 1:24; 26; 28
      3. Human history on this earth from the fall of man in Adam until the coming of the Lord will be a memorial throughout eternity of what happens when created beings choose independence from their Creator.
  3. You may be wondering how could a loving God allow such a time of horror and let all of this happen? Consider these thoughts.
    - a. We discussed this in a previous session. Since the beginning of time God has let many things happen that He is not behind or in favor of.
      1. Human beings truly have free will, and with free will come all the consequences of men's choices, going back to Adam's act of rebellion. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19
      2. God is so big and so great that He is able to use human choice (even choices He doesn't approve of) and work it for good as He causes it to serve His ultimate purpose of gathering a family.
    - b. God's intention is not, has never been, that the world go on forever as it is. God didn't make humans to be as we are—wicked and corrupt apart from Him. Nor did He make this earth to be as

it is under the curse of corruption and death. There is coming an end to things the way they are.

1. The tribulation is different from any other period in the history of man. Once it starts, in just seven years, this present age will end because a new age is at hand. Billions of people will not have the opportunity to live out a natural life span before big changes begin.
  - A. Because time is coming to an end, radical action is necessary to win as many people as possible to the Lord so that they can become part of His family.
  - B. In these years both the goodness of God and the wickedness of Satan will be on display as never before. Men will have only a short time to make a definitive choice for or against God.
2. Despite the horror of the tribulation, God's grace will be demonstrated in a mighty way, because He wants to draw as many people as possible to Himself before He comes to reclaim and renovate this earth.
  - A. There will be more supernatural signs of the reality of God given during the tribulation than ever before in the history of man. They will be like the plagues of Egypt, demonstrations of God's power designed to draw men to Him. Here's a partial list.
    1. Two witnesses with supernatural powers will oppose the Antichrist. He will kill them but God will raise them from the dead in front of the whole world. Rev 11:3-12
    2. An angel will preach the gospel. All will hear him so they can make a deliberate choice for or against God. This is the only time in human history such a thing has happened. Rev 14:6-7
    3. There will be a book available which describes to people exactly what is going on, telling them what will happen before it happens—the Book of Revelation.
  - B. The result? There will be a great harvest of souls out of the tribulation. Multitudes will be saved by acknowledging Jesus as Savior and Lord. Rev 7:9-14; Matt 24:14
  - C. Although many will lose their lives due to severe persecution, they (along with us) will return from Heaven to live on earth in the restored family home (the new earth) to live forever.

C. Let's consider this question. If believers in Jesus will be taken off the earth before this period of tribulation begins, then what does this information have to do with us? The circumstances present in the tribulation won't come out of a vacuum. They're setting up now. We are and will increasingly be affected.

1. The Bible has a lot to say about conditions in this world when the Lord returns. The Book of Revelation reveals that a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion will be in place. Rev 13
  - a. Circumstances and attitudes must and are developing to the point where, not only is a global system in place, but people are willing to welcome a world leader who has complete control.
  - b. When Revelation was written globalization was beyond anyone's imagination (let alone possible). Now, not only is the world tied together economically and technologically, many people think in terms of being part of a global community that comes together to solve global problems.
  - c. This pandemic has shown how far down the road we are—not only because the entire world was affected by a virus in a relatively short time—but because it shows how willing people give up personal freedoms out of fear and how easily a centralized government can control a population.
    1. When John wrote the Book of Revelation he used a lot of symbolic language familiar to the people of his day. And he was a 1<sup>st</sup> century man describing 21<sup>st</sup> life and warfare (for which he had no words) in terms his readers could relate to. Consequently Revelation sounds like science fiction.
    2. But we've reached the point where it's easy to see how the circumstances he described are even now developing naturally: We must have passwords to access electronic accounts. Our

movements can be tracked electronically. We can implant microchips to use for ID purposes.

2. There was a time when Judeo-Christian ethics dominated the western world. Even those who didn't live in accord with this world view acknowledged and respected it. Not anymore.
  - a. The world is increasingly abandoning the God of the Bible as revealed in Jesus Christ. As they do so, they are also abandoning truth because God is Truth or ultimate reality. John 14:6; John 17:17
    1. Absolute truth as a concept has largely been discarded in our culture. It's not unusual to hear people say: That's your truth not mine. But truth is objective. It's not based on feelings or opinions. It is not subject to change.
    2. We've produced several generations of youth to whom object facts don't matter—it's what you feel that matters. Their belief systems are based on what they feel rather than on facts.
  - b. Wholesale rejection of the truth has a catastrophic effect on society. Where there is no absolute truth, no one has the moral authority to correct anyone which leads to societal chaos.
    1. Jesus said that the years leading up to His return will see increasing lawlessness and Paul wrote that there will be perilous times on earth before the Lord returns because of the behavior of people. Matt 24:12; II Tim 3:1-5
    2. Paul also wrote a lengthy passage where he described what happens when men and women willfully reject the truth of God. Rom 1:18-32
      - A. It leads to increasingly debased behavior and, ultimately, a reprobate mind. A reprobate mind is one that is unable to make decisions in its own best interests.
  - c. Not only will these debased behaviors and decisions made by reprobate minds frustrate us, they will increasingly affect our lives in negative ways. We can't avoid it or pray it away. We have to learn to deal with it.
- D. Conclusion: How bad will circumstances get before Christians are taken off the earth? I'm not sure. But knowing and understanding what is happening and why will help you keep everything in perspective. Remember, it's not what you see it's how you see what you see.
  1. In the context of worsening human behavior as the end of this age draws near, Paul wrote that we should continue in the Word of God. II Tim 3:13-14
    - a. In the context of the Lord's return, Peter said that we will be kept by the power of God through our faith until He returns. I Pet 1:5
      1. Feeding on the identity of the Antichrist or on the 24 hour news cycle will not feed your faith. God's Word is our food. Feed your faith with Truth from the God of Truth.
      2. Shouting at the TV over the idiot decisions made by people won't help you keep your priorities right. The most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus—not come into agreement with your political viewpoint.
    - b. We need to build our faith in the fact that whatever is ahead, God will keep us by His power. He will get us through until He gets us out
  2. As the second coming of Jesus draws near we need to keep our focus on what it's all about—the culmination of God's plan to have a family on this earth renewed and restored.
    - a. The Book of Revelation opens with these words: God blesses all who listen to (this prophecy) and obey what it says. For the time is near when these things will happen (Rev 1:3, NLT).
    - b. The message of the prophecy is this: Stay faithful to Jesus no matter what comes your way, because the rightful King is coming to establish His kingdom on earth. Rev 11:15
      1. John, who saw all these events unfold in a vision given to him by Jesus, concluded his book with these words: Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20).
      2. When you understand what is happening and why—the plan of God is about to be completed and that's a good thing—you too will be able to say: Come Lord Jesus come!!