

THE BIG PICTURE

- A. Introduction: I've used this example before, but it bears repeating. Becoming a Christian is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. You get saved and then, each sermon you hear and every Bible verse you read gives you a piece of the puzzle—or the whats and whys of Christianity.
1. The problem is that no one shows you the picture on the box, the completed puzzle, or what I call the big picture. If you've tried to put together a puzzle, then you know that it's a lot easier to do when you can look at the picture on the box. If ever there was a time to see the big picture, it's now.
 - a. We're living at the end of this age and the return of the Lord Jesus is near. Before Jesus went back to Heaven two thousand years ago, He told His apostles that one of the hallmarks of this time will be religious deception.
 1. Matt 24:3—A few days before Jesus went to the Cross His disciples asked Him what sign will indicate that His return is near. In answer to their question He gave them a number of signs.
 2. But He mentioned one of them three times—religious deception, specifically false prophets and false messiahs—saying that they will deceive many. Notice, He used the word deceive four times. v4-5; 11; 23-24
 - b. The Second Coming of Jesus draws nearer with each passing day. We are living in a time of increasing deception concerning who Jesus is and why He came—not just among unbelievers but among those who profess to be Christians.
 1. The fact that Jesus tells the elect (or believers) not to be deceived means that we can be deceived. To be deceived means to believe a lie.
 2. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). It's more important than ever that we know the Jesus of the Bible. The Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, is revealed through the written Word. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses (or close associates of eyewitnesses) of Jesus.
 2. God's Word is our protection against deception (Ps 91:4). We must have accurate knowledge from the Bible. We're going to take some time and look at what it says about who Jesus is and why He came.
- B. Two thousand years ago Israel (or Palestine as the Romans called it) was divided into three provinces—Galilee (to the north), Judea (to the south), and Samaria (in between Galilee and Judea). Jerusalem was located in Judea, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem which is south of Jerusalem. However, Jesus was raised in Nazareth which is in Galilee. Matt 2:1; 19-23
1. When the time came for Jesus to begin His public ministry, He left Galilee and traveled south to the area where John the Baptist was baptizing people, in the Jordan River, east of Jerusalem—specifically near a village called Bethany beyond Jordan. John 1:28; Matt 3:13; Mark 1:9
 - a. Following His baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness located between the Dead Sea and the hill country (Jerusalem was located there) and was tempted by the devil. Matt 3:16-4:1; Mark 1:10-13
 - b. When John was imprisoned by Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) Jesus left Judea for Galilee and began His public ministry there. Matt 4:12; Mark 1:14
 2. All the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) give us details of how Jesus opened His ministry. We are going to begin with Mark's account. Mark 1:14-15
 - a. Notice that Jesus made four specific statements: The time is fulfilled. The kingdom is at hand. Repent. Believe the gospel. His statement sums up why He came and what this is all about (the picture on the box). Jesus came to complete God's plan of redemption or salvation and establish the kingdom of God on earth. Our part is to repent and believe the gospel.
 - b. v14—What Jesus preached (literally proclaimed) is called the gospel of the kingdom. Let's first make certain that we understand the term gospel. The Greek word used here (*euaggelion*) means good message or good news. Jesus had good news from God.

1. Our word gospel comes directly from an Anglo-Saxon term that means god-message (*godspel*). This early form of the word morphed into a phrase that expresses the same idea as the Greek.
2. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John's writings were not originally called "gospels". The word gospel is not used in the New Testament to refer to these four books. But the term came into use for their writings in the second half of the second century AD
- c. Over the next few months we're going to take some time to examine each part of Jesus' statement.
3. I realize that this doesn't sound exciting because it doesn't seem practical. I often hear people say: That stuff is all well and good, but I have real problems and I need real help. And that won't do it!
 - a. Sadly, many sincere Christians have false expectations about what God will and won't do for us in this life because they have misunderstandings about why Jesus came into this world. We'll discuss this in detail in upcoming lessons, but for now, consider a few thoughts.
 1. I regularly encounter people who are expecting God to do things for them that He never promised to do. Then they get frustrated and angry when it doesn't happen.
 2. Jesus didn't come into this world to solve our problems and give us techniques to live the good life. In fact, He Himself said that in this world we will have trouble. (That's the nature of life in a fallen, sin damaged world.) But we can learn to overcome in the midst of it. John 16:33
 - b. The Christianity that is preached and practiced in many circles today is very different from the Christianity presented in the New Testament. It's man-centered rather than God centered.
 1. II Cor 5:15—Christianity is about changing the thrust or motivation and direction of our lives. Jesus died so that we would no longer live for ourselves but for Him. It's not about us. It's about Him. We were created to bring glory and honor to Him. Because this is our created purpose, it is the place of greatest satisfaction for us.
 2. The is what we see in Scripture: Everything we give up (or lose) to follow Him we will get back over and above—some of it in this life and some in the life to come. Matt 19:28-29; Mark 10:28-30; Luke 18:28-30
 3. Matt 16:24-26—To deny self means to give up doing things your way when your way conflicts with God's way. Our "cross" is submission to God's will even if it is in conflict with our will.
 - A. Consider this illustration. Let's say that you love Jello so much that you were once motivated to grab a handful out of a bowl. Then you closed your fist and squeezed as tight as you could to hold onto it. What happened? It all melted and the liquid gelatin slipped through your fingers. What if you had held your hands open and let the server heap on as much as you could hold?
 - B. This principle applies to the Christian life. The more you try to hold on to your will your way, the more you will lose. But the more you give up of your will your way, the more you will receive, not just in this life but in the life to come.
 - c. The model we see in the New Testament for those who follow the Lord is not: All your troubles go away and you live the prosperous abundant life. Instead, the model is: Here's how to make it through without being damaged and to be lifted up in the midst of life's chaos. It's about changing your view of reality (the way you see things) and then living out of that perspective.
 1. The Christianity that is presented in the New Testament is one that lives with the consciousness that there is more to life than just this life, and that the life to come is the most important. The hardships of this life don't begin to compare with what is ahead. Rom 8:18
 2. This perspective will enable us, like Paul, to proclaim: These are light and momentary afflictions. And, in all these things, I am more than a conqueror. Nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord. Rom 8:37-39; II Cor 4:17-18
4. This brings us back to the big picture. Things (the hardships, pain, and loss of this life) aren't always going to be the way they are now because we're headed toward something. A plan is unfolding.

- a. In eternity past Almighty God planned a family of sons and daughters made in His image through whom He can express His glory and with whom He can have relationship. He created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ and He made the earth to be a wonderful home for His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 - b. Sin has damaged both the family and the family home. A curse of corruption and death infused the human race and the earth when Adam sinned. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12-19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 - c. God is working out His plan to undo the damage done by man's sin through Jesus. This plan is known as redemption or salvation. It will ultimately result in everything being restored to what God always intended them to be.
- C. Mark 1:15—When Jesus began His public ministry with these statements—the time is fulfilled, the kingdom is at hand, repent, and believe the gospel—His audiences weren't disappointed (i.e., we have real problems and need real help). They understood that a plan was unfolding and that if Jesus truly was the Promised Savior (which He proved through His resurrection), then His statements were vital to understanding and participating in the plan (more on this in later lessons). For now, note these points.
1. Matt 24:3—Notice that when Jesus' disciples (specifically Peter, James, and John according to Mark 13:1-3) asked Him for signs that His return is near, they connected His return with the end of this world. Word is *aion* or age (as opposed to end of the planet): What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end—that is, the completion, the consummation —of the age? (Amp).
 - a. His apostles understood from the writings of the Old Testament prophets that the way things are now isn't the way it's always going to be. They understood that a plan is unfolding.
 - b. A plan by definition has a beginning, middle, and end. The apostles understood that the coming of the Messiah (Savior, Redeemer, Jesus) was the end of the plan.
 1. Acts 2:17—When Peter preached his first sermon after Jesus returned to Heaven, Peter referred to that time as the prophesied last days. The terms “last days, last time, last hour” all refer to the last times of this present age (the age in which things are not as God intended them to be). II Tim 3:1; James 5:3; I Pet 1:5; 20; I John 2:18; Jude 18.
 2. Heb1:1-2—God, who gave to our forefathers many different glimpses of the truth in the words of the prophets, has now, at the end of this present age, given us the truth in the Son (Phillips).
 - c. The last days (or the end of this age) began with Jesus' first coming and will be completed in connection with His second coming. In Peter's second recorded sermon, he told his listeners that Jesus has returned to Heaven until the time comes to complete the plan.
 1. Acts 3:21—Whom heaven must receive until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets for ages past—from the most ancient time in the memory of man (Amp); until all is restored anew (Knox); when all things are put right (Basic); until the final recovery of all things from sin (TLB).
 2. For many of us today, the Second Coming is about the Antichrist and the mark of the beast and trying to match headline news with prophecy. But for Jesus' first followers it was about the completion of the plan. That was their perspective because they understood the big picture.
 - d. Acts 1:10-11—Jesus' first message to His followers after He returned to Heaven was: I'll be back. His words weren't intended to begin a frenzied debate over who the Antichrist is or when the battle with Gog and Magog will take place, or whether the rapture is pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib.
 1. It was meant to remind and encourage His followers that the plan will be completed. Jesus came at the right time the first time, and He will do so at His second coming. Gal 4:4—But when the proper time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman. (Amp)
 2. Thirty years later, when Jesus still had not returned, Peter was able to remind Jesus' followers of His faithfulness to keep His promise: II Pet 3:9—The Lord really isn't being slow about his

promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent. (NLT)

3. II Pet 3:13—Peter faced death as a martyr for his faith in Christ with the confidence that the plan will be completed. He knew that he and all believers will one day return with the Lord to live on this earth again after it has been released from corruption and death and restored to a fit forever home for God's family.
 2. Back to Matt 24:1-3—Note that the apostles' questions to Jesus were in response to some really bad news from Him: The Temple (the heart of their religious, cultural, political, and economic life) will be destroyed. Jesus confirmed this when He told them that His second coming will be preceded by tribulation unlike anything the world has or will ever see. v21
 - a. Despite these dire words, the apostles didn't freak out because they understood that a plan is being worked out. They knew from the writings of the prophets that the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by catastrophic times. Zech 12:1-3; Zech 14:1-2; Dan 12:1; etc.
 1. But they also knew that that they would make it through whatever catastrophe came their way in connection with the end of this age. Joel 2:28-32
 2. I Pet 1:5—Years later Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote to men and women under his charge that God will keep us by His power through our faith until the plan is completed.
 - b. Luke 21:25-28—Luke's account of Jesus' answer to His disciples' questions gives us more details about what will happen prior to the Lord's return. Notice that people will be terrified by what happens on the earth (v26). There's way more in Jesus' statements than we can discuss now, but note one point.
 1. v28—Jesus told His follower, when you see these things begin to come to pass, Look up for your redemption draws near. The idea in the Greek is: be elated in joyous expectation.
 2. Stand ready and look forward cheerfully (Beck); Stand up, hold your heads high (Phillips).
 3. II Tim 3:1—Perilous (or fierce) times are coming on the earth. They won't come out of a vacuum and the stage is already being set.
 - a. Just when you think the daily news can't get any worse and human thought processes and behavior can't get any crazier, they do. And all this will continue to worsen until the Lord returns.
 - b. If ever there was a time to devour the Word of God, it's now. Not only is it our protection against religious deception, it is the source of faith because it reveals the Living Word, the Lord Jesus. Remember, God will keep us by His power through our faith. Rom 10:17; Heb 12:2; I Pet 1:5
 - c. Treasury agents study genuine bills to help them recognize counterfeit bills. We need to read the New Testament so we can see the real Jesus and learn to see things the way they really are according to God. This perspective will protect us as it helps us walk in God's power and provision.
- D. Conclusion: We have a lot to cover in this series. Consider these thoughts as we close the first lesson.
1. If you don't understand the big picture (the fact that a plan is unfolding) then your view of reality will be skewed. You won't be able to answer some important questions: Why we are here? How we are supposed to live. What is most important? And, you'll be afraid.
 2. God's purpose in the earth right now is to gather His family to Himself through Jesus. And He is able to use the circumstances of life in fallen world (events He does not orchestrate or approve of) and cause them to serve this purpose. Eph 1:11—Who in all that happens, is carrying out his own fixed purpose (20th Cent).
 3. What should your main concern be right now? Read the Bible and make certain you are in the family of God. Then stay in the family and accurately represent the family to those around you. Phil 2:14-15