

READ THE WORD OF GOD

- A. Introduction: Shortly before Jesus left this world, some of His apostles asked Him what signs will signal that His return to earth is near. In His answer Jesus said that great difficulties will come on the earth prior to His second coming and that people will be overcome by panic and fear. Luke 21:26
1. But He urged His followers not to be troubled or terrified (Luke 21:9). Rather, He told them that when you see these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads (Luke 21:28). Look up means to lift one's self up, being elated in joyous expectation.
 - a. This brings up a question. If everyone sees the same circumstances why will some people be terrified while others are elated? Because some recognize that their redemption draws near. In other words, they know what is happening and why.
 - b. It isn't what you see that makes or breaks you in life. It's how you see what you see. Fearsome days are ahead for this world. But if you understand what is happening and why, you won't panic in fear. You will be elated in joyous expectation.
 1. The completion of God's plan of redemption is about to occur. Although it will be preceded by great tribulation (lessons for another night), it will end with all the hell and heartache that has plagued humanity since the beginning of time coming to an end—forever.
 2. And God, by His grace, will get believers through the hardships ahead until He gets us out.
 2. What is Almighty God's plan? He created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ. And, He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. The Bible begins and ends with God on earth with His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 2; Gen 3; Rev 21:1-4
 - a. However, sin has damaged both the family and the family home. Neither the human race nor the earth is as God intended them to be. Due to Adam's sin, human nature was altered and men became sinners by nature, disqualified for sonship, and the earth was infused with a curse of corruption and death. Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Gen 3:17-19
 - b. But from the time the damage was done, God has been promising the coming of a Redeemer who will undo the damage—the Lord Jesus Christ. Gen 3:15
 1. Jesus came to earth 2,000 years ago to pay for sin at the Cross and make it possible for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters of God when they believe on Him.
 2. He will soon come again to complete God's plan by cleansing the earth of all sin, corruption, and death as He restores this world to a fit forever home for the Lord and His family.
 3. If you want to walk without fear in the days and years ahead, you must learn to see unfolding events in this world in terms of the big picture (God's plan for a family). You must see things as they truly are according to God. This will only happen if you become a Bible reader.
 - a. Tonight, we begin a series on the most important thing you can do to prepare for the trying times which are already well underway. Read God's Word—particularly the New Testament!
 - b. Over the next several weeks I'm going to give you practical suggestions that will help you utilize the Bible more effectively and equip you for the challenges that lay ahead.
- B. Christians struggle with Bible reading for several reasons—it's boring; they don't understand it; they have wrong expectations as to what it will do for them. Others truly believe that they read the Bible because they read selected verses and passages or devotionals and other books with scriptures in them.
1. So, we need to begin with some statements about the Bible—what it is, why it was written, and what it will do for you. The Bible isn't a love letter from God. It's not a book of promises or a collection of wise sayings. It wasn't written to help you live a successful life.
 - a. I realize that there are promises and wise saying in the Bible, and that you're life will go better for you if you read the Bible. But that's not why it was written. The Bible was written to reveal

Almighty God and His plan of redemption—the salvation that He has provided through Jesus.

- b. The word Bible comes from a word that means books. The Bible is a collection of 66 books and letters that all together tell the story of God’s desire for a family and the lengths to which He has gone to obtain that family through Jesus. Every book and letter adds to or advances the story in some way.
 - b. The Bible is 50% history. It is a record of God’s interaction with men as He has worked out His plan to have a family. It tells of real people and real events, verifiable through secular historical records and through archaeology (lessons for another day).
2. For many people, reading the Bible means reading random verses. We open it up and start to read wherever our eyes land, hoping to get a “good” verse that will pep us up or give us an answer to our immediate crisis. But, like any other book or letter, the Bible wasn’t written to be read that way.
 - a. If you send me a six page letter, is this how you would want me to read it? First I read a sentence in the middle of page five. Then I read two sentences at the beginning of page three. Next I read a part of a line from page one. Lastly I read another sentence on page one, close the letter and announce that I’ve read it.
 - b. Not only would I not understand the point and purpose of your letter, it is possible that I may draw really wrong conclusions about what you’ve written because I’ve taken random verses out of context. Yet, that’s how we read the Bible. No wonder we don’t understand or get much out of it.
 1. The Bible isn’t a collection of independent, unrelated verses. Chapter and verse divisions were added for reference purposes, centuries after the Bible was completed.
 2. There are 31,101 verses in the Bible. Even if you have read 1,000 of those verses and can quote hundreds of them—that leaves over 30,000 verses unknown to you.
 - c. The Bible is a collection of books and letters with one theme—God’s plan to have a family. And each book and letter is meant to be read from start to finish the way we read any other book or letter.
 1. All the writings were written by someone to someone about something. Those factors set the context. Scripture can’t mean something to us that it would not have meant to the first readers.
 2. We think of the Bible in terms of: What does it mean to me? It doesn’t matter what it means to you. What matters is: What does it say? What was the person who wrote the words trying to communicate to the people to whom he wrote?
 3. II Tim 3:16—The Bible is no ordinary book. It is a book from God. It is the Word of God, given to men by the inspiration of God.
 - a. Inspiration, in the original Greek, is *theopneustos*, made up of two words, *theos* (God) and *pneo* (to breathe or blow). The Scriptures were literally breathed by God.
 - b. The Bible is a supernatural book that will affect you and produce change in you. We could do entire lessons on this, but consider one statement about what God’s Word will do.
 1. Matt 4:4—Jesus said that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. Comparing it to food helps us understand how it works and what it does. God’s Word is food for our inner man. It produces growth in us.
 2. You don’t have to understand how spinach imparts iron to your body, but you must eat it for the spinach to do its work. So it is with the Bible. You don’t have to understand how it works in you to produce change, but you must eat it (take it in by reading it) in order for it to do its work.
 4. We’re at the beginning of a new year. I want to challenge you to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. (The Old Testament is much easier to understand once you’re familiar with the New Testament. More on this point in later lessons.
 - a. Read systematically. Don’t skip around and read random passages. Read each book and letter from start to finish. Don’t stop and look up words or consult commentaries. Just read. The goal is to become familiar with the New Testament. Understanding comes with familiarity.

1. Read regularly. Set aside ten to fifteen minutes time each day (or as close to that as possible) and read as much as you can. Leave a marker where you stop and pick up where you left off the next day. Try to read some of the smaller epistles in just one sitting.
 2. This doesn't mean you can't ever skip around or look up things in a commentary. But do that at another time besides this regular, systematic reading time.
 - b. Regular, systematic reading of the Bible will change the way you see things and give you a framework from which to understand and deal with life. As your view of reality changes and as you begin to see things the way they really are according to God, it will change how you live.
 - c. When you get to the point where you truly believe that nothing can come against you that's bigger than God (and that happens through regular reading), it will give you a stability that will hold you steady no matter what comes your way.
5. For the rest of the lesson, we're going to get back to the fact that Jesus told His followers, when you see troubling times come on this earth prior to my return, be elated in joyous expectation. Who can do that?
- C. When Jesus came to earth the first time He was born into a people group (the Jews) that, based on the writings of their prophets was expecting God to send a Redeemer—the Messiah—who would establish the kingdom of God on earth (Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27). Many of them became convinced that Jesus was and is that Person.
1. During the three plus years that Jesus spent with his twelve apostles He revealed to them that He was not at that time going to establish the visible kingdom of God on earth. But He would return at some point.
 - a. Several days before Jesus was crucified, His disciples asked Him to give them the sign that will indicate His return is near. Matt 24:3—Tell us, when will this take place, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end—that is, the completion, the consummation—of the age? (Amp)
 1. The word translated world in Matt 24:3 in the KJV is *aion* or age in the Greek. The term age is sometimes used by theologians to identify specific eras or periods of God's dealing with man.
 2. We live in a particular age that is soon going to come to an end. Theologians refer to this age as the church age for obvious reasons. Here's another title: We're in the age in which things are not as God intended them to be because of sin. This age will end when Jesus returns.
 - b. Jesus had much to say in answer to their question. Notice these points. In v4-7 He spoke of false christs and religious deception, wars and rumors of wars, famine, pestilence, earthquakes.
 1. In v8 Jesus compared these signs to the pains of childbirth. The word translated sorrows in the KJV is the Greek word *odin*. It was used for the pain and travail of childbirth: with all these the birth pangs of the new age begin (NEB).
 2. By comparing these signs to birth pangs Jesus helps us understand how to view events leading to His return. When a woman goes into labor, no one calls for prayer to stop the labor even though it grows increasingly painful, because they understand that a process is underway. But awareness of the end result enables the woman to go through the process with hope.
 2. Let's back up and notice how this whole question and answer session began. Jesus and His apostles were leaving the Temple grounds and the men pointed out the various buildings at the site. Jesus responded by telling them that all of those buildings were going to be completely destroyed. Matt 24:1-2
 - a. The Temple complex was the center of their religious and cultural life, the heart of their national identity. Yet the apostles were not freaked out by what Jesus said. Instead they asked when the end of the age will come and what signs will indicate that He is about to return.
 - b. These men weren't alarmed because they knew from the writings of the Old Testament prophets (their Bible) that the world as it is (filled with sin, corruption and death) is coming to an end.
 1. They knew that earth will be made new as the conditions of Eden are restored and the kingdom of God is established on earth, bringing God and man together in the home He made for us.
 2. They knew that these events will be preceded by a time of calamity with Jerusalem being

attacked (Zech 14:2-3). But they also knew God's people will make it through (Joel 2:10-11).

3. I Pet 1:5—Many years later, in the context of the completion of God's ultimate plan for a family in a renewed and restored world, Peter (one of the apostles who posed the question to Jesus in Matt 24) stated that that God's promise to His people is to keep (guard) us by His power through our faith.
 - a. Faith or trust in God comes to us by hearing God's Word because it tells us what God is like and what He has done, is doing, and will do in our lives. Rom 10:17
 - b. Several years later, Peter wrote a second epistle. He knew he was soon going to be executed (II Pet 1:12-16) and he knew that false teachers would infiltrate the church prior to the Lord's return, just as Jesus warned before He left this world (II Pet 2:1-4),
 1. II Pet 3:1-3— The years leading up to Christ's return are referred to as the end times or the last days. Peter wrote these final words to believers, exhorting them to remember God's Word.
 2. Remember and understand what the holy prophets said long ago (the Old Testament) and what our Lord and Savior has commanded through the apostles (the New Testament).
4. The apostle Paul also proclaimed the importance of the Word of God (the Bible) as we face the end of this age. You may recall that Jesus personally taught Paul the message he preached. Gal 1:11-12
 - a. Paul wrote II Timothy to inform his son in the faith that he was soon going to depart this life (by execution) and to urge Timothy to stay faithful and persevere no matter the hard times ahead.
 1. Timothy's father was Greek, but his mother was a Jew (Acts 16:1-3). His mother and grandmother raised him in the Scriptures, training him to hope for Messiah (II Tim 1:5; II Tim 3:15).
 2. He was living in Lystra (located in the province of Galatia) when Paul preached the gospel there on his first missionary journey. Timothy became a believer in Jesus, and eventually became one of Paul's most constant companions. Paul placed him in charge of the work at Ephesus.
 - b. Paul knew the days after he died this world would grow increasingly dark as Jesus' coming neared. No doubt he wanted his last words to Timothy to be as impactful and relevant as possible.
 1. II Tim 3:1—Paul wrote that in the last day perilous times will come on the earth. Perilous is translated from a Greek word meaning hard to bear or grievous (*Vine's Dictionary*). *Strong's Concordance* adds: difficult, dangerous, furious. Perilous times of great stress and trouble—hard to deal with and hard to bear (Amp)
 2. II Tim 3:1-9—Paul went on to list the behaviors of people that will make the times challenging. Wicked people will do evil things. They will resist the truth and lead many into false teachings. Ultimately they will get what they deserve.
 - A. v10-13—Paul reminded Timothy that godly people will be persecuted as he had been and that “Evil men and imposters will flourish. They will go on deceiving others, and they themselves will be deceived (NLT), but that God is our deliverer.”
 - B. v14-15—But you continue or remain in the Scriptures. “Remain faithful to the things you have been taught...you have been taught the holy scriptures from childhood” (NLT).
- D. Conclusion: You can't continue in what you've never started. If you aren't already a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament, I urge you to become one. You'll be a different person by this time next year.
 1. The Bible is a supernatural book that will work in you and change the way you see God, yourself, and this life. But you must eat the food!
 2. Accurate knowledge from God Word will enable you to walk through the days and years ahead elated, in joyous expectation because you understand that God's plan of redemption is very near to completion—and that's something to be excited about.
 3. We have lots more to cover next week!!