

GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH

- A. Introduction: Just a few days before Jesus was crucified, He told His followers that the years preceding His return will be marked by times of great difficulty which He likened to birth pangs—increasing in frequency and intensity as His return draws closer. Acts 1:9-11; Matt 24:4-8
1. The second coming of Jesus Christ is very near. The Bible has a lot to say about the conditions in this world at the time He returns (many lessons for another day). The point for us is that these circumstances won't come out of a vacuum. They are setting up even now, and we have to deal with it.
 - a. We are in the last of the last days of this present age. We need to be aware of the times we're in and be prepared for what is coming on the earth.
 1. For the past several weeks we've been talking about the fact that the best thing you can do to prepare for what is ahead is to become a regular systematic reader of the New Testament.
 2. This means read each of its books and letters (epistles) from the beginning to end over and over. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular, repeated reading.
 - b. In the last two lessons I tried to encourage you to read by helping you recognize that the Bible is more than fairy tales or Sunday School stories. It was written by real people to other real people for specific purposes. Understanding this helps us get more out of the Bible.
 1. The New Testament was written, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by men who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
 2. None of these men set out to write a religious book. They set out to proclaim the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. This reality changed their lives so much so that they were willing to die rather than deny what they witnessed.
 3. Christianity is founded on a historical fact—the resurrection of Jesus. When His resurrection is examined with the same criteria used to assess other historical events, the evidence for the resurrection is overwhelming. (You can learn more about the evidence in books such as: *The Resurrection Factor* by Josh Mc Dowell and *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel.)
 - A. The resurrection is the central fact of Christianity. It authenticates everything Jesus said (Matt 16:21). It is proof that He is the Son of God and that our sins are paid for (Rom 1:4; Rom 4:25). It is proof that our bodies will also come out of the grave (I Cor 15:20-23).
 - B. The Bible was written to give us this information and to “make you wise and save you through faith in Christ Jesus” (II Tim 3:15, Beck).
 2. When Jesus warned His followers that the years leading up to His return will be difficult, He also listed signs that will indicate His return is near. Jesus made it clear that there will be great religious deception—specifically false christs and false prophets who will deceive many. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24
 - a. According to *Webster's Dictionary* to deceive means to cause to believe what is untrue. The Greek word that is translated deceive means to cause to roam or wander from safety, truth, or virtue.
 - b. The protection against and antidote for deception is the truth. According to Jesus, the Word of God is the Truth. The Bible, the written Word of God is Truth. John 17:17; Ps 119:142; 151; Eph 1:13
 - c. Ps 91:4—His truth will encompass thee with armour (Septuagint). In this lesson we're going to discuss how God's Word, the Truth, will protect us from the deception coming on the world.
- B. This first generation of believers—the eyewitnesses of Jesus and those who came to faith in Him through their testimony—lived with the consciousness that Jesus was (is) coming back.
1. There are 27 documents in the New Testament. Only four of them do not refer to the Second Coming of Jesus—and three of them are short (single chapter) personal letters (Philemon, II and II John). (The Epistle to the Galatians also does not mention Jesus' return. It was written to counter false teachers who were influencing believers with false teaching, a serious situation that it needed immediate attention.)

- a. Only the doctrine of salvation is mentioned more often in the Bible than the Second Coming. But this is appropriate because Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan of redemption (salvation).
 - b. This is God's plan: He created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ. 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
 1. 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
 2. But from the time the damage was done, God has been promising the coming of a Redeemer (a Savior) who will undo the damage—the Lord Jesus Christ. Gen 3:15
 - A. 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.
 - B. He will soon come again to complete God's plan by cleansing earth of all sin, corruption, and death as He restores this world to a fit forever home for the Lord and His family.
 - c. We've made the point in previous lessons that the Bible was written to reveal God and His unfolding plan of redemption (salvation), His plan to have a family. The Scriptures "are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim 3:15, NASB).
 1. Understanding that a plan is unfolding and that the consummation of the plan is approaching will help us keep an eternal perspective and recognize that there's more to life than just this life.
 2. The better and greater part of our life is ahead, after this life, first in the present invisible Heaven (if we die before the Lord comes) and then on this earth made new in connection with His second coming. Isa 65:17; II Pet 3:13; etc. (Lots of lessons for another day)
2. Two of the documents included in the New Testament are epistles written by Paul (an eyewitness of the risen Lord who was personally taught by Jesus, Gal 1:11-12) to Timothy, his son in the faith (I Tim 1:2). Both of these letters are laced with references to the second coming. I Tim 4:1; 6:14; II Tim 1:12; 3:1; 4:8
 - a. Timothy's father was Greek but his mother was a Jew (Acts 16:1-3). His mother and grandmother raised Timothy in the Old Testament Scriptures, training him to hope for the Messiah (II Tim 1:5).
 - b. Timothy was living in the city of Lystra, in the province of Galatia (Asia Minor), when Paul visited the city on one of his missionary trips. Timothy responded to Paul's message (Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised according to the Scriptures, I Cor 15:3-4), and eventually became one of Paul's most constant companions.
 1. Paul ultimately put Timothy in charge of his work in the city of Ephesus (in modern day Turkey). Paul wrote the New Testament epistles to Timothy to help guide him through his responsibilities as overseer in Ephesus and nearby cities.
 2. Paul urged Timothy to teach sound doctrine, combat false teaching, encourage Christian conduct among believers, and raise up qualified leadership to help him.
 - c. Paul wrote the second letter specifically to inform Timothy faith that he was soon going to depart this life (by execution) and urge him to stay faithful no matter the hard times ahead. No doubt that Paul wanted his last words to Timothy to be as impactful and relevant as possible.
 1. The apostle knew that the days after he died would grow increasingly dark as the coming of Jesus neared. II Tim 3:1—But understand this, that in the last days there will set in perilous times of great stress and trouble—hard to deal with, and hard to bear (Amp).
 2. Paul went on to list the behaviors of people that will make the times challenging, stating that it will get worse before it gets better (v2-13). But he exhorted Timothy to continue or remain in the Scriptures (v14-15).
 3. As Paul wrote this epistle he pointed out a key trait in people in the final years preceding Christ's return.

- a. II Tim 3:5—They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly (NLT).
 - 1. II Tim 3:6-8—They will take advantage of vulnerable, sin-laden people who are eagerly following new teaching but never come to the knowledge of the truth because these teachers fight the truth just as Jannes and Jambres fought against Moses.
 - 2. II Tim 4:3-4—For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths (NLT).
 - 3. Notice a common theme in these passages—willful resistance to the truth (II Tim 3:8). To resist means to stand against or oppose. Refuse to listen to the Truth (II Tim 4:4, Beck).
 - b. Peter (another eyewitness of the resurrected Lord who spent three years under Jesus’ teachings) said the same thing about people in the days prior to the Lord’s coming (the last days).
 - 1. II Pet 3:3-5—Peter wrote that will be scoffers (mockers who ridicule the truth) and are willingly ignorant of the truth, the Word of God. They willfully forget (ASV); willfully shut their eyes (20th); deliberately ignore (RSV).
 - 2. Note that these people walk after their own fleshly desires. They want to follow their own lusts. They don’t want the restraint of God’s Word (the Truth) so they ridicule and reject it.
 - 3. There are two kinds of ignorance. One, you are ignorant because you lack knowledge. Two, you have the information but reject it. You willfully refuse to believe or accept it. That’s the kind of ignorance Paul and Peter referenced.
- C. We are living in the time that Paul and Peter described. Yes, there have always been people who resist the truth and are willfully ignorant, but not on the worldwide scale that we see today.
- 1. There was a time when Judeo-Christian ethics and morality dominated the western world. Even those who didn’t live in accord with it acknowledged and respected this world view. Not anymore.
 - a. As the world increasingly abandons the God of the Bible (revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ) they are discarding truth because God is Truth. He is the ultimate reality (Deut 32:4; Jer 10:10; Ps 31:5). He is the standard by which everything else is judged. Jesus is Truth Incarnate (John 14:6).
 - b. Absolute truth as a concept has been largely been discarded in our culture. It’s not unusual to hear people say: That’s your truth, not mine. But truth (the way things really are) is objective. It isn’t based on our feelings or opinions. It is not subject to change. Two plus two equals four whether you feel it or believe it.
 - 1. In the western world we’ve raised several generations of youth to whom objective facts don’t matter. They believe it’s what you feel that matters. (The Bible says that he who trusts in his own heart is a fool. Prov 28:26)
 - 2. The Oxford Dictionary selected “post-truth” as 2016’s international word of the year. They do this yearly to show ways in which our language is changing in response to current events.
 - A. Post-truth is defined as: relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.
 - B. Such thinking is creeping into Christian circles. A 2016 Barna Research Group survey reported that 40% of practicing American Christians no longer believe in absolute truth.
 - 2. Wholesale rejection of the truth has a catastrophic effect on society. Consider some things Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Romans. Rom 1:18-32 is a lengthy passage about the wrath of God or God’s right and just response to sin (lessons for another day). But there are some key points that shed light on the conditions developing in this world as the return of the Lord nears. Note that truth is mentioned twice.
 - a. v18—God’s wrath is toward those who hold the truth in unrighteousness—sinful, wicked people who push the truth about God away from themselves. (NLT)

- b. v19-23—Paul then focuses on those who are willfully ignorant of God. God has revealed Himself through His creation. These men recognize God but refuse to worship or thank Him.
 - 1. Notice that their willful rejection of God affects their minds. v21—Their thoughts turned to worthless things, and their ignorant hearts were darkened (Beck). They made fools of themselves by making and worshipping idols that look like men, birds, animals, and snakes.
 - 2. They changed the truth of God into a lie. v25—Instead of believing what they knew to be the truth about God, they chose to believe lies (v25, NLT).
- c. When we read the entire passage down to the end of the chapter we see that this willful rejection of the truth of God is the beginning of a downward spiral that leads to increasingly debased behavior.
 - 1. Note God’s response to their choices. He lets them reap the consequences of their actions. He gives them over to their lusts, vile affections, and ultimately to a reprobate mind. A reprobate mind is unable to make decisions in its own best interest. v24; 26; 28
 - 2. Sin produces its own reward. It works death and deceives and hardens you to receiving more light from God (Rom 6:23; Rom 7:13; Heb 3:13). The end result is a reprobate mind.
- d. Back to II Tim 3:8—Notice that Paul described these people at the end of this age who resist the truth as having corrupt minds and being reprobate concerning the faith.
 - 1. The word corrupted means entirely spoiled, depraved—They have lost the power to reason (NEB); their minds are distorted (Phillips).
 - 2. Reprobate means unapproved and, by implication, worthless—Are counterfeits so far as faith is concerned (Berkeley); useless for any purpose of faith (Moffett); utterly worthless (20th Cent); Their minds are depraved, and their faith is counterfeit (v8, NLT).

- D. Conclusion: We’ll discuss this more fully next week, but we live in a unique time. The return of Jesus is near and He said that the hallmark of these years will be false messiahs (Matt 24:4-5, 11, 24). The world is heading toward accepting the ultimate false christ, a man known as Antichrist, Satan’s counterfeit of Christ.
- 1. We are and will increasingly face pressure to abandon the truths of Scripture in the name of tolerance, inclusion, and diversity. We’re witnessing truth being replaced with demands that we approve of beliefs and behaviors than are in direct opposition to the Word of God.
 - 2. The idea that everyone’s opinion is equally valid has permeated society. Inclusion and diversity have come to mean that everyone is right and no one is wrong because we all have our own truth to live. If you say that an opinion or belief is wrong either factually or morally, you are labeled a bigot or a hater.
 - a. The Bible is no longer recognized as absolute, ultimate truth—even in some Christian circles. It has become a source for proof texting or finding a verse that supports your particular idea.
 - b. Of course, everyone has a right to their beliefs and opinions in a free country. But if one opinion is based on accurate knowledge and another is not, then the one not based in fact is less valid if not completely invalid.
 - 3. All of us are potentially vulnerable to deception—otherwise Jesus would not have to warn us to take heed that we don’t get deceived. And, because of the changes in society the pressure to abandon Bible standards in regard to faith and morality will only increase.
 - 1. The Word of God is our protection against deception. The Living Word, the Lord Jesus (Truth Incarnate) reveals Himself through the written Word, the Bible. John 18:37—Jesus came to bear witness of the truth. If you want to know the truth, look at Jesus (Heb 12:2).
 - 2. If we are familiar with Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible, we will be able to recognize false christ and resist false teachings not matter the pressures from society.
 - 4. Accurate knowledge from the Word of God is vital in the days ahead. Become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. Lots more next week!!