

THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

- A. Introduction: Hi everyone! Welcome to our last livestream from our living room. Next week we'll be back at church for our first live, in person meeting in ten weeks. We'll be following the social distancing guidelines that we're all used to by now. And we'll wear masks or face coverings for a few weeks as we transition back to normal. Tonight, we're going to sum up some thoughts and bring this portion of our discussion to a conclusion.
1. When Jesus left this world He promised His followers that He will return. He also told them that the years leading up to His second coming will be increasingly challenging and end with tribulation unlike the world has ever seen. Acts 1:9-11; Matt 24:21-22
 - a. While listing signs that will precede His return, Jesus compared some of them to birth pains—specifically earthquakes, famines, war, ethnic strife, and pestilence. Matt 24:6-8
 1. Although all these things have been occurring since the fall of man, they will increase in frequency and intensity as labor pains do.
 2. But Jesus told His followers that when you see these things begin to unfold: Be not troubled or frightened. Be elated in joyous expectation because the plan of redemption is about to be completed. Matt 24:6; Luke 21:28
 - b. To follow Jesus' instructions, you must understand the big picture—a plan is unfolding. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters and made this world to be home for his family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12
 1. Human beings are disqualified from sonship because of our sin. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin by dying on the Cross. By doing so, He opened the way for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. Heb 9:26-28
 2. Because of Adam's sin the world has been infused with corruption and death. Jesus will come again to cleanse the family home from this curse and restore the earth to a fit forever home for God and His family. Isa 65:17; Rev 21:1-4
 2. Just as there was a generation that saw the first coming of Jesus and experienced their own unique challenges, so there will be a generation that sees His second coming. That likely includes some of us.
 - a. The Bible provides us with a lot of information about what the world will be like when Jesus returns. We are witnessing those circumstances setting up now—and it's painful to observe.
 1. There is a worldwide abandonment of Truth and a corresponding willful rejection of Almighty God as He is revealed in Jesus. This has led to increasingly debased behaviors and reprobate decisions. These behaviors and decisions are and will continue to produce chaos in society.
 2. There is a continuing move toward globalism which will culminate in a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion presided over by a Satan inspired and empowered man.
 - b. The years ahead will grow more and more challenging and we must learn how to navigate through them. That's been our focus for the past several weeks.
- B. The men who wrote most of the verses we've cited these past nine weeks were eyewitnesses of Jesus. They walked and talked with Jesus and saw Him conquer death by rising from the grave. When He told them that He'd be back, they had no doubt about His return, and it affected the way they lived their lives.
1. That first generation lived with the awareness that a plan is unfolding. It gave them a hope and an expectation in the midst of the challenges they faced. It helped them keep their priorities right.
 - a. Consider some things that Peter wrote. He was one of Jesus' first followers and selected to be one of the twelve apostles who were with Jesus throughout His earth ministry. He was present when Jesus described the signs that will indicate His return is near (Mark 13:3). Notice, that the topic of the Lord's return (and the related chaos) did not freak Peter out.

1. This is what Peter said in one of the first sermons he preached after Jesus returned to Heaven: Jesus will remain in Heaven until the time for the complete restoration of all things as God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets for ages past—from the most ancient time in the memory of man (Acts 3:21, Amp).
 2. In a letter Peter wrote to believers he said: But the end and culmination of all things has now come near; keep sound-minded and self-restrained and alert therefore for [the practice of] prayer (I Pet 4:7, Amp).
 3. In a letter written just before he was executed, Peter described earth's coming transformation (II Pet 3:10-13), and then wrote that he was looking forward to the new heavens and new earth. He finished up with these words: And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life. And be at peace with God. And remember the Lord is waiting (delaying His coming) so that people have time to be saved. (II Pet 3:14-15, NLT).
- b. Consider some things that the apostle Paul wrote. He became a believer when the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him as he was traveling to Damascus, Syria to arrest Christians.
 1. In the context of instructions on marriage, Paul said keep this life in perspective because time is short (v29, KJV). Short means draw together or wind up. Paul summed it up this way: Those in frequent contact with the things of the world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them (NLT), for this world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV).
 2. He told Christians to use their time wisely: Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and effective so that you will have the right answer for everyone (Col 4:5-6, NLT).
 3. Eph 5:15-16—So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. (NLT)
2. In the context of the Lord's return, Paul admonished believers to hold tightly to the words of life and to shine the light of Christ brightly in this dark world (Philippians 2:14-16).
 - a. One of the best ways to shine the light of Christ in this world is by possessing and demonstrating peace of mind. Peace of mind is freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts and emotions.
 - b. To experience peace of mind you must learn to focus your attention (mind) on things above.
 1. Col 3:4—Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (ESV); Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth (NLT).
 2. Isa 26:3—You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you (ESV).
 - c. We keep our mind focused on the Lord by focusing on His Word. The Bible shows us what God is like and what He has done, is doing, and will do. It shows us His unseen power and provision as it reveals His unfolding plan of redemption. All of this inspires faith or trust in Him in our hearts. Rom 10:17; Ps 9:10
 3. One of the best things you can do for yourself as the return of Jesus draws near is to become a regular reader of the Bible, especially the New Testament. In the context of the perilous times leading up to the Lord's return Paul told Timothy, his son in the faith, to continue in the Word of God. The Bible gives us accurate information that allays our fears. II Tim 3:14-15
 - a. Christians spend a lot of time stressing over things like the identity of the Antichrist. If you were a regular reader of the New Testament, you would know that he has nothing to do with you—so it doesn't matter who he is. What matters is that Jesus is returning to complete the plan of God.
 - b. I've heard Christians say: I need to know what the mark of the Beast is so that I don't accidentally take it. If you were a regular reader then you would know that you can't inadvertently take the

mark. Taking the mark is a symbol of your willful submission to the ultimate false christ.

4. If you don't learn how to fix your mind on God through His Word and keep it there, your mind will be filled with anxious thoughts. You'll be angry with those who practice debased behaviors and with those who make reprobate decisions.
 - a. When you engage with people who hold different views about politics or how to handle the corona pandemic, you'll be charged up emotionally and your focus will be on getting them to see your viewpoint rather than on sharing Jesus with them.
 - b. Both fear and anger drive us to do ungodly things. Fear makes us compromise and anger makes us lash out and browbeat others.
 1. One of the best ways you can prepare for what is ahead, one of the best ways to keep your mind set on God and His Word so that you can walk in peace of mind, is to become a thankful person or develop the habit of thankfulness. It will also help you shine the light of Christ brightly.
 2. Col 3:17—And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father (NLT).
- C. Let's talk for a moment about being thankful. Most of us probably consider ourselves to be thankful people. We thank God for our family, our food, our home, and job. We thank Him for the many blessings in our life.
 1. All of that is wonderful. The problem is that there is so much to not be thankful for. And that's the stuff we complain and gripe about. We rant and rave. We rail. We curse (or pray that harm or injury will come to someone). And, in doing so, we pollute our thankfulness.
 - a. James, in the context of the importance of controlling the tongue, made the point that a fountain cannot produce both fresh and salt water. James 3:1-12. The salt water pollutes the fresh water. Your complaining pollutes your thankfulness.
 - b. Remember Phil 2:15 where Paul exhorted Christians to shine as lights in a dark world? He prefaced that statement with this one:
 1. Phil 2:14-15—Do all you have to do without grumbling or arguing, so that you may be blameless and harmless, faultless children of God, living in a warped and diseased age, and shining like lights in a dark world (J. B. Phillips)
 2. To grumble means to mutter in discontent or to complain. Thankfulness or gratefulness is the antidote for complaining. Thankful people (or people who don't complain) have peace of mind. Contentment is defined as peaceful satisfaction
 - c. Paul wrote that Christians are supposed to **be** thankful as opposed to **feel** thankful (Col 3:15). He wrote that we are to thank God **in** everything (I Thess 5:18) and **for** everything (Eph 5:20).
 1. In the good times and the bad we choose to thank God. And we thank Him for everything—the good things that come from Him and the good He can bring out of the bad that comes to us all because we live in a fallen, sin-damaged world.
 2. One of the greatest promises in the Bible is that God can take genuine evil and bring genuine good out of it. He can cause it all to serve His purposes. Rom 8:28-29; Eph 1:10-11
 - d. There's always something to thank God for, to be grateful for—the good He has done, the good He is doing, and the good He will do.
 2. Remember that in the context of the return of the Lord, Paul wrote: Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate (reasonable) in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon (Phil 4:4-5, NLT).
 - a. Paul actually used the same Greek word two times in his statement. It means to be “cheerful” as opposed to feel cheerful.
 1. Cheer is not an emotion, but rather a state of mind. When you cheer someone you urge them on or give them hope. You encourage them. We need to develop the habit of rejoicing or

encouraging ourselves and others as we await the Lord's return.

2. In the context of the trials he faced as he preached the gospel, Paul wrote that he was sorrowful yet rejoiced (II Cor 6:10). There were times when he felt sad but chose to encourage himself.
- b. One of the ways you encourage yourself is by thanking God continually for what He has done, is doing, and will do. This in turn leads to praising Him for Who He is because what He does comes out of who He is.
- c. Praise in its most basic form has nothing to do with music. It's about acknowledging God. Consider two spectacular examples of the power of thanksgiving and praise.
 1. John 6:11; 23—One of the times that Jesus multiplied fish and loaves, the miracle is referred to as giving thanks. Jesus thanked His Father for lack which became more than enough in the hands of Almighty God.
 2. II Chron 20—A deadly enemy was stopped when God's people met them with praise and thanksgiving to God. Praisers went out ahead of the army proclaiming: Give thanks to the Lord for His mercy and loving kindness endures forever (v21, Amp).
- d. As I said earlier, most of us consider ourselves to be grateful, thankful people. But let's see if we can pass the Habakkuk test. Do you do what he did in the hard times?
 1. Habakkuk was a prophet sent to Israel to call them out of idol worship so that they would not be conquered and destroyed by the Babylonian Empire. The nation didn't listen to his message, which meant that destruction came on them.
 2. Habakkuk did everything right (faithfully served God). But he had to face the consequences of reprobate decisions made by ungodly, unrepentant idol worshippers.
 - A. Hab 3:17-19—Note the prophet's response. He praised and thanked God and didn't complain about the fact that he too would experience the effects of the decisions of others—economic and political destruction. His testimony was: I'm going to praise you because you are my salvation and you will get me through until you get me out.
 - B. What did this do for him? It didn't change the times he lived in or stop the destruction of the nation. But, it lifted him up above it emotionally and gave him peace of mind.
 - C. Right now, he is in Heaven, waiting to return with Jesus when He comes again. Habakkuk will be reunited with his body raised from the grave. He, along with all believers, will live forever on this earth after it is renewed and restored to a fit forever home for God's family.

- D. Conclusion: If you want to live with peace of mind in the days and years ahead, you need to learn how to keep your mind on things above and focus your attention on the way things really are.
1. God's plan of redemption is about to be completed. Although times are and will become more and more challenging, God will get us through until He gets us out.
 - a. Become aware of what comes out of your mouth. Get control of your tongue through thanksgiving and praise to God. You can't thank and complain at the same time.
 - b. Fill your mind with thoughts of praise and thanksgiving to God. Develop the habit. Make your mind think of how good God is, how big He is.
 - c. When your mouth and mind begin to work together (in the direction of praise and thanksgiving) you'll begin to experience peace.
 2. You will get to the point where you truly are elated in joyous expectation because Jesus is coming soon. And you will be increasingly effective at shining the light of Christ to the world around you.
 3. We'll talk more about the Lord's return next week, live from church!!