

## EAGERLY AWAITING THE LORD'S RETURN

- A. Introduction: Hi everyone!! We're still stuck in our homes because the stay-at-home order has not yet been lifted in St. Louis city or county. So, we're once again livestreaming from our living room. We're using this time to talk about what is happening and why. Our purpose is to calm people's fears and increase our faith and trust in God. We continue tonight. Let's start by setting the stage for tonight's discussion.
1. We're living at a unique time in human history. The return of Jesus Christ to this world is near. How close are we? I don't think it's days, months, or even a couple of years away. But I do think it's close enough that many of us will be alive when Jesus comes to take believers off the earth. I Thess 4:13-18
    - a. Maybe you're thinking that people have predicted Jesus' return for centuries and it hasn't happened yet. So, what's different now? We could do an entire lesson on this, but consider these thoughts.
      1. The Bible gives a lot of information about the years leading up to Jesus' return, including the existence of a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion. Such a system was impossible even a few generations ago. Now, not only is it plausible, the world is increasingly moving that direction. Rev 13:1-18
      2. The Bible says the nation of Israel will be in existence when Jesus returns. Israel ceased to exist in 70AD when the Romans destroyed their nation and scattered the Jews throughout the Roman Empire. In 1948 Israel came back into existence as a nation. Joel 3:2; Zech 12; 14; etc.
    - b. Jesus gave a list of signs that will indicate that His return is near, comparing some of them to birth pangs—including pestilences (Matt 24:6-8). This pandemic and resulting chaos is a birth pang.
      1. Epidemic diseases that cause a high rate of mortality have existed since the fall of man. But they were limited in their spread by how far humans could travel. As technology advanced, so did the spread of disease.
      2. It wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1918) that it was possible for a disease to go around the world. Now, we have another one. And this one has shut down the world's economies. Remember, birth pains increase in intensity and frequency and intensity as the birth gets closer.
  2. The fact that other generations expected Jesus and He didn't return doesn't mean He's not coming back. I know one thing for sure: We're one day closer today than we were yesterday.
    - a. Jesus' first message to His followers after He returned to Heaven was: I'll be back. Acts 1:9-11
      1. Even though Jesus knew that He wasn't coming back during the lifetime of anyone who originally heard that message, He wanted them and every generation of believers since then to live with the hope that is inspired by looking for Him or expecting His return.
      2. There's something very healthy about expecting and anticipating the Lord's return. It helps you keep your priorities right and have the right perspective on this life. There's more to life than just this life. Eternal things matter most. The best is yet to come for those who know the Lord.
    - b. The second coming of Jesus is a major Bible doctrine. Out of 27 New Testament documents only four of them don't mention the return of Jesus (Galatians, Philemon, II John, III John).
      1. There are twice as many prophecies about His second coming as His first. Only the doctrine of salvation is mentioned more often in the Bible than the promise of Christ's return. But that's appropriate because Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan of redemption or salvation.
        - A. In eternity past God devised a plan for a family. He created human beings to become His sons and daughters and made earth to be home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12-19; Rom 8:20; etc.
        - B. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross and make it possible for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters through faith in Him. He will come again to

cleanse and restore earth to a fit forever home for the family. Heb 9:26; Isa 65:17; etc.

2. 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. He didn't make this earth to be as it is under the curse of corruption and death. There's coming an end to things the way they are.
  - A. A plan is unfolding. A plan by definition has a beginning, middle, and an end. There is an end coming and it's a good end. It began with creation and it will end with the restoration of the family and the family home.
  - B. Eph 1:9-10—God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ; designed long ago according to his good pleasure. And this is his plan; At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth (NLT).
3. For many of us, talk of the second coming generates frenzied discussions of the identity of the Antichrist and what 666 stands for, along with vehement debates over whether the rapture is pre, mid, or post-trib.
  - a. We focus on the details. Who will start the Ezekiel 38 war and why? What exactly is the mark of the Beast so that I don't accidentally take it? We focus on the individual trees and miss the forest, the big picture, and the fact that God is our deliverer and will preserve us whatever comes our way.
  - b. Jesus' first apostles (the twelve) were eyewitnesses of the Lord. They saw Him multiply food and get money out of a fish's mouth. They witnessed him calm raging seas and turn water into wine. They observed Him outwit the Pharisees time and time again. They saw Him heal sick and broken bodies and raise people from the dead. And they witnessed Jesus Him rise from the dead Himself after a cruel, grueling death. Then they saw Him go back into Heaven and they received His first message to them: I'll be back.
    1. The terms second coming, rapture, pre, mid, and post-trib, new world order, etc. didn't exist in the apostle's day. They developed through the centuries that followed as varying ideas and opinions developed about the Lord's return.
    2. Here's what the second coming meant to the apostles. This wonderful Being, the One they walked and talked with for over three years, the One they were persuaded was and is the Promised Redeemer, said He'd be back—and they were thrilled!!
  - c. For the rest of tonight's discussion, I want to see if we can recapture some of the excitement and hope they derived from that knowing that Jesus is coming back.
- B. The Bible is 50% history. It is a record of real people you will meet one day. Many of them interacted with Jesus when He came to earth two thousand years ago. Let's focus on Peter, one of the first to be called by Jesus (along with Andrew, John, and James). Let's try to understand his view of Jesus' return.
  1. Peter and the others knew from the writings of the Old Testament prophets that the Lord is going to one day establish His visible, eternal kingdom on a renewed and restored earth (Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27; Isa 51:3; Isa 65:17; Ezek 3:35; etc.).
    - a. Matt 24:1-3—Shortly before Jesus was crucified He told His apostles that the Temple was going to be destroyed. The Temple was the center of their religious, cultural, political, and economic life, so Jesus was describing the destruction of life as they knew it.
    - b. Yet Jesus' statement didn't make them afraid. They knew from the writings of the Old Testament prophets that there would be a time of calamity preceding the Lord establishing His kingdom. But they also knew that God's people will make it through. Dan 12:1; Zeph 1:14; Joel 2:11-31; etc.
      1. When Jesus made His statement about the fate of the Temple, the apostles knew that Jesus was going to leave them, but would return at some to establish the kingdom of God on earth.
      2. So they asked Jesus what signs will indicate that His return is near. Keep in mind that, at that time, these men fully expected to see the Lord's return. Yet, none of the signs about wars,

- earthquakes, or tribulation scared them—nor did a reference to Antichrist (Matt 24:15).
2. Following the resurrection Jesus spent 40 more days with His apostles talking to them of things related to the kingdom. They asked him: Will you now restore the kingdom to us? Acts 1:3; 1:6
    - a. Peter, in one of his first sermons following Jesus' return to Heaven, proclaimed: Acts 3:21—For he (Jesus) must remain in Heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his prophets (NLT).
    - b. God's been talking about the end since the beginning because a plan is unfolding—a good plan with a good end for all those who know Him. Consider just a few statements:
      1. Moses wrote that following Adam's sin and the entrance of corruption and death into creation, God promised the coming of the Redeemer who would undo the damage. Gen 3:15
      2. Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam (alive during Adam's last 92 years), prophesied that the Lord will come to deal with wickedness in the earth and cleanse it. Gen 5:22-24; Jude 14-15
      3. Isa 25:6-8—The Lord will spread a wonderful feast for everyone around the world... In that day he will removed the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. (NLT)
      4. Isa 9:6-7—The government shall be upon his shoulder and of His kingdom and peace there will be no end.
  3. Two epistles or letters written by Peter to believers in Jesus are included in the New Testament. His second epistle was written from prison when he was waiting to be executed for his faith in Christ. His epistle gives insight into how expecting Jesus to return to complete the plan of God shaped his life.
    - a. Over thirty years had passed and Jesus was not back. And Peter was not going to see Jesus' return from this side of Heaven. II Pet 1:14—But the Lord Jesus Christ has shown me that my days here on earth are numbered and I am soon to die. (NLT)
    - b. Peter wrote to remind believers of what they already knew. He wanted to be certain that, after he was gone from this world, they would not forget.
      1. II Pet 3:2—I want you to remember and understand what the holy prophets said long ago and what our Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles. (NLT)
      2. We have not followed fables. We were eyewitnesses of the Lord. II Pet 1:16—For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming again. We have seen his majestic splendor with our own eyes (NLT).
    - c. Peter addressed the fact that Jesus had not yet returned and there were some people ridiculing the idea that He would return.
      1. II Pet 3:3-4—First, I want to remind you that in the last days there will be scoffers who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing they desire. This will be their argument: Jesus promised to come back, did he? Then where is he? Why, as far back as I can remember, everything has remained exactly the same since the world was first created. (NLT)
      2. II Pet 3:9—The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for you sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent. (NLT)
    - d. There's not a hint of disappointment in Peter's letter over the fact that Jesus had not yet returned. Peter understood that a plan is unfolding and that God is presenting gathering His family. The more time that passes before Jesus returns, the more people that can become part of the family.
  4. Peter faced death knowing that this present life was not his only chance at life on earth. He was looking forward to the Lord fulfilling His promise of earth made new (*kaino*, Greek word that means new in quality or form as opposed to new in time). II Pet 3:13
    - a. Peter knew from the Old Testament prophets that his body would be raised from the grave and he'd live on earth again (Job 19:25-26). Jesus promised him that in the "rebirth of the world" he would be rewarded for everything he gave up to follow the Lord (Matt 19:28). He saw Jesus rise from the

dead as the first fruits or guarantee that the rest of our bodies will be raised (I Cor 15:23).

- b. In his epistle Peter wrote about the coming transformation of the earth: But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall **pass away** with a great noise, and the **elements shall melt** with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be **burned up**...all these things shall be **dissolved**, and the elements **shall melt** with fervent heat. II Pet 3:10-12
- c. This passage is sometimes misinterpreted to mean that the earth will be destroyed by fire when the Lord returns. But Peter isn't describing destruction. He's describing transformation. God will speak and purge the physical elements that make up this world with the fire of His Word. Jer 23:29
  1. **Pass away** is made up of two Greek words that mean to come or go by. It carries the idea of passing from one condition or state to another. It never means cease to exist. **Elements** is a Greek word that means the most basic components of the physical world (atoms, molecules).
  2. **Shall melt** (v10), **dissolve** (v11-12) are the same Greek word and means to loose (John 11:44—loose him and let him go). **Burned up**, in the earliest Greek manuscripts, is a word that means found or shown. The idea is the exposure of corruption for the purpose of removal.
  3. **Shall melt** (v12) is the Greek word *teko*. We get our English word *thaw* from it. Winter releases its grip when the spring thaw sets in. Corruption and death will one day release their grip on this world and the earth will be loosed from bondage to both.
- d. II Pet 3:11-12—With some of his final words, Peter urged believers: Since all these things are thus on the verge of dissolution, what sort of men ought you to be in all holy living and godly conduct (Weymouth), looking for and hastening the coming of the Lord. Hasting in the Greek means to speed or urge on, and by implication, to await eagerly.

- C. Conclusion: How does all this relate to dealing with the pandemic and the social and economic issues generated by it? Times are going to get worse. And we must learn how to deal with it.
  1. It is very easy to be fearful, anxious, angry, and stressed out over what is going on. If you want to walk through this with any kind of physical and emotional victory, you have to learn how to look past what you see with your eyes to the plan of God.
    - a. Jesus' word to His followers is: Fear not. When you see these things begin to happen, be elated in joyous expectation because redemption draws near. Luke 21:18
    - b. Peter and the other apostles were not afraid. They faced their many hardships bolstered by the knowledge of God's plan and the end result. Their excitement about the Lord's return to complete the plan gave them hope in difficult and even hopeless circumstances.
  2. I've said this every week so far. The best thing you can do for yourself as the coming of the Lord draws near is learn to keep your focus on Jesus. The second coming is about Jesus—not the Antichrist, not the mark of the Beast, not the new world order.
    - a. I Pet 1:5—Peter said in his other epistle, in the context of the Lord coming to complete the plan of God, that He will keep us by His power through our faith.
    - b. Jesus is the author (source) and the finisher (perfecter) of our faith. The Living Word, the Lord Jesus, reveals Himself to us through the written Word, the Bible. Eyewitnesses of Jesus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote the books of the New Testament.
  3. Instead of spending so much time looking at things that worry and confuse us, let's look at what builds our faith. If we will look at Jesus we can develop the same excitement His first followers had. Jesus is coming soon!!