

REJOICE

- A. Introduction: Hello everybody. Once again we are livestreaming from our home due to the stay at home orders in place because of the corona virus pandemic. We've been using this time to talk about what is happening and why so that we can calm people's fears and build our faith and trust in Almighty God.
1. The return of Jesus Christ to this world is rapidly approaching, and the Bible makes it clear that the years preceding His return will become more and more challenging.
 - a. Jesus listed signs that will indicate His return is near, one of which is pestilence (an epidemic disease that causes a high rate of mortality). Jesus compared these signs to birth pangs that will increase in frequency and intensity as His coming draws closer and closer. Matt 24:6-8
 - b. Jesus indicated that right before His return there will be tribulation unlike anything the world has ever or will ever see. In fact, if He did not come back and stop it, all flesh would die. Matt 24:21-22
 1. The Bible gives a lot of information about the world during this period. It describes a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion that will be in place. Rev 13:1-18
 2. This global system will be presided over by a Satan inspired and empowered man—Satan's counterfeit Christ. This man's actions and the responses of the people of earth to him will cause much of tribulation and destruction in these years. Dan 8:25; II Tim 3:1-5
 2. We've made the point in previous weeks that the second coming of Jesus is a very large topic. It involves many events that unfold over a period of time before it is completed.
 - a. Christians have a tendency to focus on individual events and details (many of which, although predicted in Scripture, are not yet clearly explained). Not only do we scare ourselves, we end up missing the big picture, or what the return of Jesus is all about. Consequently we aren't as excited about His return as we could and should be.
 1. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan to have a family of holy, righteous sons and daughters on this earth—transformed and restored to pre-sin its conditions. Isa 65:17
 2. Jesus came the first time to pay for sin by dying on the Cross so men and women can become God's sons and daughters. He will come again to cleanse and renew the earth and make it a fit forever home for God and His redeemed family. Heb 9:26; II Pet 3:10-12; Rev 21:1-4
 - b. There are two phases or stages to Jesus' return (each with its own sub-topics). Jesus will first come in the clouds, not all the way to earth. Only His followers will see Him. He will take all believers off the earth back to Heaven for a time. I Thess 4:13-18
 1. A seven year long period of tribulation will begin, with the second half being especially severe. Matt 24:21-22; II Thess 2:1-10
 2. At the end of this seven year period Jesus will come all the way to earth, bring an end to the tribulation, and begin the process of restoring the earth. Matt 24:30
 3. I'm frequently asked the question: How bad will it get before Jesus takes believers off the earth? I don't know the answer to that question. Here's what I do know.
 - a. Much of what Jesus predicted in Matt 24 (following the birth pangs, v9-30) are events that will take place after believers are removed from the earth. We'll be gone before the worst of the tribulation occurs, in part because it has nothing to do with the church.
 1. The focus will return to national Israel (the physical descendants of Abraham, the racial group through whom Jesus came to earth the first time). Lots of lessons for another time.
 2. Jesus will actually return to that land, to the Mount of Olives, just outside of Jerusalem, from which He departed 2,000 years ago. Acts 1:9-11; Zech 14:4; Zech 12:1-3; etc.
 - b. However, the condition described in the Bible as being in place when Jesus returns won't come of a vacuum. They're setting up now as the world moves toward globalism and increasingly rejects the One True God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ.

1. People around the world are becoming more and more willing to surrender their national sovereignty and welcome a world ruler who will unashamedly try to take the place of Almighty God. The western world particularly, is increasingly moving away from Judeo-Christian values, and has been for several decades now.
 2. This pandemic has shown just how quickly the world can change and how willing people are to give up basic rights and freedoms when they are afraid. It also shows how few people think in terms of crying out to God for help. Instead it's: We can beat this if we all come together.
 - c. The apostle Paul wrote a lengthy passage in Romans in which he described what happens when human beings willfully reject the truth of God. Rom 1:18-32
 1. It leads to increasingly debased behavior and ultimately to a reprobate mind. A reprobate mind is one that is unable to make decisions in its own best interests.
 2. These debased behaviors and decisions made by reprobate minds will not only increasingly frustrate us, they will more and more affect our lives in negative ways. We can't avoid it or pray it away. We have to learn to deal with it.
 4. Last week we talked about how Jesus' first followers viewed His return. They had no fear of the Lord's coming, even though they knew about the tribulation that will precede His return. Instead, they eagerly anticipated His coming. They expected to see it and that fact influenced how they lived their lives.
 - a. For them, the second coming wasn't a theological position to be defended or a doctrine with an argument supporting a pre-trib or mid-trib rapture. It was a living reality.
 - b. It was excitement over the fact that this wonderful Person they walked with for over three years—this Being they saw conquer death, Hell, and the grave—promised to come back to them to complete God's plan of redemption by establishing the kingdom of God on earth.
 - c. As we read their writings in the New Testament we find that they have a lot of good insight into how to deal with the challenges coming on the earth. Tonight, we'll consider some things Paul wrote.
 1. Paul wrote 14 of the 27 New Testament documents and references to the Lord's return permeate his writings. Only two of his epistles have no reference to the Lord's coming (Galatians and Philemon).
 2. Paul was not one of the original twelve, but was converted 2-3 three years after the crucifixion when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. In subsequent appearances, the Lord taught Paul the message that he preached. Acts 9:1-6; Acts 26:16; Gal 1:11-12; II Cor 12:1-4
- B. Paul wrote the epistle to the Philippians. Although it is a short, personal letter, there are five references to the coming of the Lord. They give us insight into how anticipating the Lord's soon return affected Paul and the people he preached to. Phil 1:6; Phil 1:10; Phil 2:16; Phil 3:20-21; Phil 4:5
1. Philippi was a city located in Macedonia (northern Greece). The Book of Acts records three missionary journeys undertaken by Paul as he preached the good news of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire. He visited Philippi on his second journey (AD 50). The city was his first stop. Acts 16
 - a. Paul was successful at establishing a church or community of believers in Philippi. And he maintained close contact with them through the years. They sent him financial gifts and he visited them at least two times on his third missionary journey.
 - b. He wrote this epistle over ten years after the church was established when he was imprisoned in Rome for preaching the gospel (AD 60-62). Paul survived the imprisonment, but when he wrote to the letter he did not yet know if he would live or die.
 2. We could (but aren't going to) do an entire lesson on each statement Paul made to them about Christ's return. But tonight, I want to focus on a few main points. Let me read them in the setting in which Paul made each statement.
 - a. Paul opened his epistle by telling the Philippians not only that he prayed for them continually, but

he told them what he prayed. Among other things he prayed that their love for each other would increase and that they would continue to grow in knowledge and understanding (v3-11).

1. Phil 1:10—For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until Christ returns (NLT).
 2. Paul wanted these people to live lives that reflect what matters most—living in a way that glorifies God—until He returns.
- b. Phil 2:14-16—In everything you do, stay away from complaining and arguing, so that no one can speak a word of blame against you. You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them. Hold tightly to the words of life, so that when Christ returns, I will be proud that I did not lose the race and that my work was not useless (NLT).
1. Note that Paul admonished them to hold tightly to the words of life (the good news of Jesus) and to shine the light of Christ brightly in this dark world. How? By not complaining and arguing. Why? Because the most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 - A. With all the craziness in the world and the non-stop 24 hour news coverage, it's very easy to devote too much of your thought time and your talk to what's wrong in the world and what's wrong with all the people.
 - B. Each one of us has a view of and an opinion about what's going on and why. Our tendency is to want to yell at the TV and browbeat people into seeing things our way. Our flesh gravitates toward that kind of behavior.
 2. However, not only do we rob ourselves of peace of mind, we certainly don't shine brightly in this dark world. If someone is going to speak ill of you, let it be because you believe that Jesus rose from the dead—not because you believe that that anyone who votes like they do is an idiot.
3. In the context of the return of the Lord Paul wrote: Phil 4:4-5—Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon (NLT).
- a. Notice, that Paul expected them to live in a way that accurately represented the Lord to the people around them. The word translated considerate (moderation in the KJV) means mild. Mild means gentle in nature or behavior. We need to be very aware of how we treat others. Are we giving an accurate representation of the Lord Jesus Christ?
 - b. Notice also that Paul told them to rejoice. He actually used the same Greek word two times in his statement. It means to be “cheerful” as opposed to feel cheerful. This is one of the most effective ways to shine your light in a dark world.
 1. Cheer is not an emotion, but rather a state of mind. In the context of the many trials he faced as he preached the gospel, Paul wrote about being sorrowful yet rejoicing. II Cor 6:10
 2. In other words, there were times when he felt sorrow, but he chose to rejoice. Rejoicing is the the same Greek word he used in Philippians—cheerful. When you cheer someone you urge them on or give them hope. You encourage them.
 - c. The Philippians witnessed Paul demonstrate these traits when he first came to their city. He and his fellow worker, Silas, were arrested and jailed when Paul cast a devil out of a servant girl and her owners complained to the local authorities. Acts 16:16-24
 1. Even though they were arrested for doing the work of God, beaten, and put in the inner part of the prison, they rejoiced. They praised God. They didn't compromise or complain. They shined their light. The result: They were supernaturally delivered and the jailor and his family converted. Tradition says that man became the pastor of the church at Philippi.
 - A. We think of praise as something we do when we feel good or our favorite song is being

played during the worship service.

B. But praise is not an emotional response to God. It's the appropriate response. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for His goodness and wonderful works. Ps 107:8, 15, 21, 31

2. Praise to God, in its most basic form is acknowledging Him by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. Praise is an expression of faith in God and it opens the door to His power in your circumstances as it encourages you.

4. Keep in mind that all these people expected the Lord to return in their lifetimes. We know from other things Paul wrote that he exhorted believers to encourage themselves with the Lord's soon return.

a. Remember when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about what will happen when the Lord comes in the clouds to take believers off of the earth? I Thess 4:13-18

1. Your loved ones who have already died will be with Jesus. They will be reunited with their bodies raised from the grave and your bodies will be changed (glorified) as you are caught up to meet them and the Lord.

2. Paul concluded with v18—So comfort and encourage each other with these words (NLT). When you rejoice you cheer yourself by acknowledging the reasons you have hope.

3. By the way, the city of Philippi was Paul's first stop on his missionary journey. The city of Thessalonica was his second stop (Acts 17). We know he taught these things to both churches. He himself stated that he preached the same message in all the churches (I Cor 4:17).

b. We find two good examples in the epistle to the Philippians of how Paul cheered or encouraged them and they could in turn cheer themselves. And, how we can encourage ourselves—a plan is unfolding. It's a good plan and it will be completed.

1. Phil 1:6—And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again. (NLT)

2. Phil 3:20-21—But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take these weak bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own. (NLT)

C. Conclusion: We have more to say about this next week. But let's close with this thought. This world is going to get crazier and crazier and times will grow more and more challenging.

1. One of the best things you can do for yourself and those around you as we faced the challenges ahead is to learn how to rejoice or to cheer or encourage yourself in the Lord. By doing so, you will become an effective light in an increasingly dark world.

2. What can you rejoice about? With what information can you encourage yourself? How about this—
Rejoice: The Lord is at hand. Rejoice: Your character will be perfected. Rejoice: Your body will be restored and made new. Rejoice: God will get you through until He gets you out.