

## SEE THE BIG PICTURE

- A. Introduction: The return of Jesus Christ to this world is close enough that many of us will experience some of the events connected with His return. Although this is an exciting time, it also brings unique challenges because the Bible indicates that the years preceding Jesus' return will be perilous. II Tim 3:1
1. We've been making the point that these perilous times won't come out of a vacuum. They are setting up now and producing increasing difficulties. Consequently, our nation is facing huge problems—as are many other countries around the world. We must know how to deal with these challenges.
    - a. We're taking time to look at what the Bible says about the times we are in. God is not behind the increasing chaos in this world. But in His foreknowledge, He knew it would come to pass and He has given us information in His Book to help guide us through the months and years ahead.
      1. When Jesus' disciples asked Him about signs that will indicate His return is near, Jesus talked about some of the hardships, comparing them to birth pains. Labor pains increase in frequency and intensity as the birth nears. Matt 24:6-8
      2. Jesus told His follower that when they see these things begin to come to pass they should look up and lift up their heads. The original Greek language conveys the idea that they (we) should be elated in joyous expectation because their (our) redemption draws near. Luke 21:28
    - b. Redemption is God's plan to deliver this world from bondage to sin, corruption, and death through Jesus. In order to be elated in joyous expectation you must understand that a plan with a good end is about to be completed. We are living at the time of the end.
  2. The expression "second coming of Jesus" is actually a broad term that covers a period of time and a number of events leading up to the actual return of Jesus Christ to this world. People have a tendency to focus on individual people and events from this period and miss the big picture. Let's review the big picture as we begin tonight's lesson. Jesus is coming back to complete the plan of God.
    - a. God created both humanity and this planet for His purposes. Humans were created to become sons and daughters of God. Earth was created to be a home for God and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
    - b. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin and neither one is as God created them to be. Sin altered human nature, disqualifying us for sonship, and the family home was infected with a curse of corruption and death. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 8:20; etc.
    - c. This development did not surprise Almighty God. He already had a plan in mind to undo the damage, regain His family, and restore the family home through Jesus' death and resurrection.
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin and open the way for sinners to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. John 1:12-13
      2. He will come again to restore the earth and transform it into a fit forever home for God and His family. The Bible begins and ends with God on earth with His family. Gen 2-3; Rev 21:1-5
      3. The more clearly you see the big picture the more able you'll be to deal with the troubling times that are coming on the earth. Not only will you be convinced that God isn't behind the world's troubles, you'll know that He will protect and preserve His people in the midst of the trouble.
- B. A plan is unfolding, a plan that was conceived before the world began and extends beyond this present life and this world in its current condition. That is our future and our hope.
1. There's so much emphasis in modern Christianity on fulfilling your destiny in this life. Consequently, because most of us live ordinary lives, it's easy to feel guilty or feel like a failure.
    - a. On the flip side, if your destiny is only for this life, even if you accomplish your dreams, you're in sad shape because, as an eternal being, this present life is only a tiny part of your existence.
      1. God knew us before we existed and, motivated by love, chose us for a purpose that is bigger than and will surpass and outlast this present life.

2. Your created purpose is bigger than this life. Your purpose is to become part of God's family and live forever with Him in loving relationship in the beautiful home He created for us. When you understand this fact, it gives your life meaning and lightens the load of this difficult life.
- b. Rom 8:18-21—That's why I don't think there's any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens (The Message Bible).
2. Consider just a few of the statements that the Bible makes about God's plan. Note these points:
- a. Eph 1:4-5—Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure (NLT).
- b. I Pet 1:19-20—(God) paid for you with the precious life blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him for this purpose long before the world began, but now in these final days, he was sent to earth for all to see. And he did this for you (NLT).
- c. II Tim 1:9-10—It is God who saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began—to show his love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus. And now he has made all of this plain to us through the coming of Christ Jesus, our Savior, who broke the power of death and showed us the way to everlasting life through this Good News (NLT).
- d. 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 was his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth (NLT).
- e. Col 1:18-20—He (Jesus) was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fitted in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross (The Message Bible).
3. A plan by definition has a beginning and an end. We are living at the time of the end. The end of the plan began two thousand years ago with the first coming of Jesus. Through His death on the Cross He activated God's plan to restore all things.
- a. The Bible refers to this period (since Jesus' first coming as the last time or the last days. Acts 2:17)
1. Heb 1:1-2—Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (ESV).
  2. I John 2:18—Dear children the last hour (time) is here. You have heard that Antichrist is coming, and already many such antichrists have appeared. From this we know that the end of the world (as it is) has come (NLT).
- b. Why is there a two thousand year gap between Jesus' first and second coming? God has been gathering His family. There are more people alive now than have lived on earth throughout its entire existence. II Pet 3:15—The Lord is waiting so that more people have time to be saved (NLT).
1. God's plan for a family in a perfect world is unfolding according to His timing. Jesus came the first time at the right time: But when the right time came, God sent his son...God sent him to buy freedom for us...so that he could adopt us as his very own children (Gal 4:4-5, NLT).
  2. Jesus will return at the right time. Peter proclaimed: (Jesus has returned to and will remain in Heaven) until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke 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

- A. God has been talking about the end since the beginning because He is working out His plan for a family in a perfect world.
  - B. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned God promised the coming of the Redeemer (Jesus) who would undo the damage done (Gen 3:15) and He directed men to keep a written record of the plan as He increasingly unveiled aspects of the plan (the Old Testament).
- C. When people don't consider the second coming of Jesus in terms of the big picture they can draw really wrong conclusions about what is happening and what will happen as we get closer to Jesus' return.
1. All kinds of so called prophecies are circulating on the internet about what God is doing. Many of these prophecies are about the United States—we're going to have a national revival and put God back on the throne, prayer and the Bible back in school, etc. Some claim to be finding prophecies about America in the Bible. Consider these points.
    - a. We're living in a time of rampant deception (Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24). We must learn to judge these prophecies in terms of the big picture and the overall plan of God so that we aren't deceived.
    - b. The United States is not mentioned in the Bible. Neither is Canada, Brazil, Mexico, India, China, the United Kingdom, France, etc. The Bible is redemptive history. It is a record of the people and places who were directly involved in the unfolding plan of redemption—Abraham's descendants (the Jews, Israel) and the lands of the Middle East (primarily Israel).
    - c. The second coming of Jesus isn't just for America or just for those people who are alive on earth when He comes. Redemption is not about restoring a specific people group or a specific country.
      1. I realize that God has some yet unfulfilled prophecies pertaining to Israel (lessons for another day). But those are only part of the events that come under the umbrella of the second coming.
      2. The second coming will affect every human being who has ever lived, going back to Adam. No one ceases to exist when they die. All are somewhere now awaiting the plan's completion.
        - A. Those who have responded to the revelation of God's salvation through Jesus given to their generation will be rewarded with a new forever home—this earth made new. Isa 65:17
        - B. Those who have rejected the Lord will be forever banished from God's presence and from all contact with the family and the family home in a place called the Lake of Fire or the second death. II Thess 1:7-9
  2. Daniel, one of Israel's prophets, was shown much information about the time of the end. He received his prophetic visions between 605-536 BC.
    - a. He was the first to report that at the time of the Lord's return the world will be under the control of a wicked ruler, and that there will be a time of trouble like the world has never seen (Dan 2, 7, 8, 11). Much of what John the apostle described in the Book of Revelation was first mentioned by Daniel.
    - b. For a moment forget that Daniel was a great apocalyptic prophet. Think of him as a man just as interested in the second coming as we are because it affects his future just as it does ours.
      1. Because the Bible is a progressive revelation that gradually reveals God's plan, Daniel along with the rest of the prophets didn't know that there would be two separate comings of Jesus.
      2. But he was familiar with some concepts that had already been introduced and would be further developed in the New Testament—like resurrection of the dead and eternal separation of those who are God's and those who aren't. Dan 12:1-2
    - c. Daniel wrote that all those who are written in the book will be delivered. That phrase about the book shows up in Revelation—anyone not found in the Book of Life will be forever separated from God and the family. Rev 20:12-15; etc.
      1. People have all kinds of strange ideas about what the Book of Life is and how you get in it and stay in it. Consider what it meant to Daniel's audience—Israelites. This would have been a familiar idea because of the ancient custom of keeping genealogical records for the family or a

nation (Gen 5:1). The Book of Life is a figurative expression that comes out of this practice.

2. Daniel's audience understood written in the book to mean: those who belong to God, those who are in covenant with Him. It was a real book, a record of those who were His through faith in Him—a faith expressed through keeping the Law of Moses. Ex 32:32
  - A. Daniel's point is that God knows those who are His and He delivers and will them. God has known those who are His since before the foundation of the world.
  - B. Rev 13:8—And all the people who belong to this world worshipped the beast. They are the ones whose names were not written in the Book of Life, which belongs to the Lamb who was killed before the world was made (NLT).
- d. Daniel was troubled by much of what he saw (Dan 7:15) in his visions and did not understand everything that he witnessed. When Daniel asked an angel how will all of it finally ends, he was told: Go now, Daniel, for what I have said is for the time of the end (Dan 12:8, NLT).
  1. No one yet understands everything in the Book of Revelation or all the particular details about every event connected with the second coming. We need to focus on what is clearly revealed.
  2. The as yet unclear aspects of these events will be clear to those who live through the final tribulation of this age and will help them run their race and finish their course.
    - A. Daniel was an old man over 90 years old when he received his last vision. The angel who spoke to him didn't explain everything but gave Daniel words of comfort.
    - B. Dan 12:13—As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance (reward) set aside for you (NLT).
- e. Daniel had examples from the Scripture of others who, like him, were and are awaiting the culmination of God's plan of redemption, people who like him lived during the middle of the plan.
  1. Job lived during the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Job knew that he would leave this world at death, but that he would one day return with his Redeemer: I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end, he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God (Job 19:25-26, NIV).
  2. When Abraham's grandson Joseph was dying in Egypt, he made his family swear to carry his bones back to Canaan (Israel). He knew that his body would one day be raised from the dead, and the first place he will stand is his beloved homeland. Gen 50:24-26

- D. Conclusion: Just as there was a generation of people that saw the first coming of Jesus, there will be a generation that witnesses the second coming—with all the unique challenges that it brings. We have to learn to see our present circumstances in terms of the big picture. Just like Daniel, we can draw encouragement and instruction from accounts of real people who, like us, are awaiting the completion of God's plan.
1. Remember what we've said in previous lessons. The tribulation of the final years of human history will be caused by the behavior of people who have rejected Almighty God and embraced a false christ.
  2. Many godly people born in the middle of God's plan throughout human history have experienced challenging circumstances that they were not responsible for.
    - a. Abraham's nephew Lot, a godly man, found himself living in Sodom, wicked city about to be destroyed for its wickedness (we'll say more about it in a later lesson). The apostle Peter made reference to Lot's situation in II Pet 2:6-9. Lot was vexed by what was going on around him. We too will be troubled by the increasing wickedness and chaos in the world. But God delivered Lot out of the destruction that came. We do will be delivered.
    - b. The prophet Habakkuk ministered in Israel just before it was destroyed by the Babylonian Empire. Life as he knew it was about to change because of the wicked behavior of ungodly men and women. Yet he chose to rejoice in God because he knew that God was his salvation. Hab 3:17-19
  3. Remember Lot and follow Habakkuk's example. We have much more to discuss next week!!