

## A DAY OF RECKONING

- A. Introduction: Jesus' first message to His followers when He left this world was: I'll be back (Acts 1:9-11). The Bible gives much information about world conditions at the time of Jesus' return—and it's not a pretty picture. We are watching many of these conditions emerge right before our eyes.
1. We must learn how to navigate through the months and years ahead if we're going to maintain peace of mind in the face of what we're witnessing. Note these key points.
    - a. First, you must keep your eyes on the big picture. This means you need to understanding why the Lord is returning. He is coming back to complete God's plan for a family. Eph 1:4-5
      1. God created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He formed this earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Both have been damaged by sin, beginning with Adam. Because of the first man's sin, human beings are born with a sin nature and this world is infused with corruption and death. Isa 45:18; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; etc.
      2. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin so that sinners can be transformed into sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. He will come again to cleanse the earth and restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. Heb 9:26; Isa 65:17; etc.
      3. Don't lose sight of this fact: We aren't here to fix up the world. It can't be fixed because its root problem is sin. It will take the transforming power of God to root it out.
        - A. We are here to shine the light of Jesus Christ to the people around us so that people can come to saving knowledge of Him and become sons and daughters of God.
        - B. Remember that our message is the death and resurrection of Jesus (the gospel), our enemy the devil (not people), and our fight is the fight of faith (the fight to hold on to the truths of God's Word no matter what we see or feel).
    - b. Second, you must accept that times will grow increasingly difficult. The Bible reveals that when the Lord returns there will be a system of world government, economy, and religion in place. It will be controlled by a Satan inspired man whom the world will receive and worship as God. Rev 13
      1. Those circumstances won't come out of a vacuum. They are setting up now as the world moves increasingly toward globalism. A worldwide abandonment of Truth is occurring, along with a corresponding willful rejection of Almighty God as He is revealed in Jesus.
      2. This, combined with the influence of seducing spirits, along with the removal of cultural restraints, has led to increasingly debased behavior and more and more reprobate decisions. All of this is producing greater chaos and violence in society. I Tim 4:1-2; II Tim 3:1-5
      3. God is not behind any of this in any way. He is good and good means good. However, He has given men free will and with free will comes not only choice, but the consequences of choice. When people abandon God He gives them over to their choices and results. Rom 1:24; 26; 28
    - c. Third, you must develop an eternal perspective. An eternal perspective makes this very difficult life easier to deal with. II Cor 4:17-18
      1. An eternal perspective lives with the awareness that there is more to life than just this life—and the greater and better part is ahead after this life.
      2. An eternal perspective understands that the ultimate stage for the reversal of life's hardships, pain, injustice, and loss is in the life to come.
      3. An eternal perspective recognizes that eternal things matter more than the temporary things of this life. We are sojourners who are only passing through this life as it is. I Pet 1:17; I Pet 2:11
  2. We're working on developing an eternal perspective as we clear up misunderstandings about the second coming that scare believers who have no reason to be afraid.
    - a. People fear the second coming in part because they mistakenly think that the chaos and suffering in these years comes from God's wrath and judgment, both of which are part of what is ahead.

- b. Therefore, we need accurate understanding of what God’s wrath and judgment is, why it is consistent with a good God, and how it does and does not affect us. We continue in this lesson.
- B. The apostle Paul opened his letter to the church at Rome with the statement that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. Then he immediately stated why all need salvation: God has wrath against sin and all men are guilty of sin before a holy God. Rom 1:16-18
1. God is righteous (right) and just (always does right). To be true to His righteous and just nature He must respond to sin. Wrath is God’s righteous and just response to man’s sin.
    - b. The just and righteous penalty for sin is death or eternal separation from God who is Life. However, if this penalty is enforced, God’s plan for a family will not be realized.
      1. So the Lord devised a way to carry out justice in regard to our sin and transform fallen men and women into sons and daughters—without violating His righteous nature.
      2. At the Cross Jesus took the penalty for our sin on Himself. God’s wrath—the just and right response of God to our sin—went to Jesus. Justice was carried out in regard to our sin.
      3. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, when we put faith in Him as Savior and Lord, God can justify us (declare us not guilty) and make us sons and daughters by giving us eternal life. Rom 8:29-30
    - c. God’s wrath toward sin has been expressed, but you must receive this expression in order for His wrath to be removed from you. If you have not accepted Jesus and His sacrifice then God’s wrath (irreversible separation from Him) awaits you when you leave this earth at death. John 3:36
      1. God is not presently dealing with men in wrath. He is dealing with humankind in mercy, giving them a lifetime to repent. II Pet 3:9; Luke 6:35; Matt 5:45; Acts 14:16-17
      2. God does not dole out punishment on a sin by sin basis. Difficult circumstances are not the wrath of God. His wrath went to Jesus on the Cross.
        - A. God’s desire is to remove the sin and transform the sinner. But if the sinner refuses to turn to the Lord then he will not be transformed.
        - B. He will be forever removed from contact with God and His family of redeemed sons and daughters. That is the wrath of God.
  2. Through Jesus we are delivered from the wrath to come. If you have accepted Jesus and His sacrifice then there is no more wrath for your sin. You are delivered from the wrath to come. I Thess 1:10; I Thess 5:9; Rom 5:9
    - a. Rom 8:1—If you die in Christ there is no judging guilty of wrong for you: Therefore [there is] now no condemnation—no adjudging guilty of wrong for those who are in Christ (Amp).
      1. Wrath is never mentioned in Scripture in connection with believers. Wrath is for the children of disobedience. Eph 5:6; Col 3:6
      2. The Greek word translated disobedience means an unwillingness to be persuaded, willful unbelief, obstinacy.
    - b. There is a sense in which the wrath of God is the remedy for sin. The wrath of God went to Jesus and produced wholeness for us—The chastisement (punishment) needful to obtain peace (with God) and well-being for us was upon Him, and with the stripes that wounded Him we are healed and made whole (Isa 53:5, Amp).
  3. In Acts 17:22-31 we find a record of the gospel that Paul preached to unbelievers in the Greek city of Athens. We aren’t going to do a detailed study of his message, but for now, note these points.
    - a. Paul said: I see that you are very superstitious (v22; the Greek word means religious). I saw all your many altars and notice that you have one for the unknown God. You have been worshipping Him without knowing who He is, and now I wish to tell you about him (v23, NLT).
      1. He is the Creator of all and gives life to everything. His purpose is that we would seek Him, though He is not far from us. In Him we live and move and exist. Since we are His creation,

we should not think of Him as an idol crafted by human hands from metal or stone. v24-29

2. God has winked at (overlooked, not punished) this in the past, but now commands all men to repent. Repent is made up of two Greek words that mean a change of place or condition and mind. Repent means to think differently and implies turning from unbelief and sin to God. v30
  - b. Paul said: You need to stop worshipping idols and turn to the True God because a day of reckoning is coming. (God) has set a day for judging the world with justice (righteousness) by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead (v31, NLT).
    1. Judge the world refers to all humanity, not just those on earth at the time of the second coming. No one ceases to exist when they die. All are somewhere now (more on this in later lessons).
    2. There's a lot in Paul's statement. Note one point: Jesus is the standard by which all men will be judged. How did they respond to the revelation of Jesus given to them in their lifetime?
  - c. This day of reckoning or Judgment Day is not a literal 24 hour day. It's a period of time associated with Jesus' second coming. There are a lot of topics connected with this day. Let's sort it out.
- C. Jesus came into this world through a people group that was expecting the Lord to come at some point and restore His creation (first century Jews). They referred to it as the Day of the Lord, a term used by the Old Testament prophets. Joel 2:1; 11; Joel 2:31-32; Joel 3:14-21; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:14-15; etc.
1. According to the prophets, the Lord will come to deal with the ungodly, deliver His people, and then live among them. We noted last week that the prophets were not clearly shown that there would be two comings of the Lord separated by many centuries. The Day of the Lord was their term for what we now call the second coming.
    - a. First century Jews were aware that the Day of the Lord will include a time of wrath and judgment. But they weren't afraid because they understood that judgment is an administration of justice. Justice means punishing evil but it also means rewarding good.
    - b. They knew from the writings of the prophets that God has promised since the beginning of this age (this period in which things are not as He created them to be) to remove from His creation all that is not of Him. And that's a good thing.
      1. Jude 14-15—Now Enoch, who lived seven generations after Adam, prophesied about these (wicked) people. He said, Look, the Lord is coming with thousands of his holy ones. He will bring the people of the world to judgment. He will convict the ungodly of all the evil things they have done in rebellion (NLT).
      2. Ps 37:28-29—For the Lord loves justice, and he will never abandon the godly. He will keep them safe forever, but the children of the wicked will perish. The godly will inherit the land (the earth) and will live there forever (NLT).
  2. The prophet Daniel was permitted to look far into the future and given information about the latter days, the time we know as the second coming. He was shown the empires that would rule over Israel from his time up until the Day of the Lord—Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Dan 2:24-45; Dan 7:1-28
    - a. Daniel was also shown the final world system that will be in place when the Lord returns—this global system ruled by the man commonly called Antichrist. Daniel's visions indicate that this final system will bring great destruction to the world but that God and His people will ultimately prevail. And this world will finally be as God intended it to be (lots of lessons for another time).
    - b. Consider these points in connection with our discussion. Daniel saw the final world system first as a metallic statue (chapter 2) and then as a beast with ten horns (nations) out of which a little horn (Antichrist) appears (chapter 7).
    - c. We get stuck on trying to figure out who the horns are (which nation, what man) and miss the big picture. When the Lord comes the wicked are destroyed and God's people inherit His kingdom.
      1. Dan 2:44—During the reign of those kings (the final world government), the God of heaven

will set up a kingdom (on earth) that will never be destroyed; no one will ever conquer it. It will shatter all these kingdoms into nothingness, but it will stand forever (NLT).

2. Dan 7:13-14—As my vision continued...I saw someone who looked like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven...He was given authority, honor, and royal power over all the nations of the world so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed (NLT).
  3. Dan 7:26-27—But then the court will pass judgment, and all his power (Antichrist) will be taken away and completely destroyed. Then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to the holy people of the Most High. They will rule forever (NLT).
3. The apostle John was given additional information about the final world system that will be in place when Jesus returns. It's found in the Book of Revelation which is an account of John's vision about the second coming. His book says a lot about God's wrath. We'll get to it, but for now consider one point.
    - a. Rev 11:15-18 describes what will happen when the Lord takes possession of this world at His coming. Twenty four elders in Heaven fall down before the Lord and worship Him, proclaiming: We thank you for you have assumed power and have begun to reign (v16-17, NLT).
      1. A quick side note. Here's another example of where people get focused on details and miss the big picture. They try to figure out who these elders are. But it's not fully clear who they are.
      2. This is what we know. They are inhabitants of Heaven, men who are perfected (and now see things clearly in a way that we don't yet), and they glorify God for what He is about to do.
    - b. Note v18—The nations were angry with you, but now the time of your wrath has come (NLT). Remember what wrath is: an administration of justice. There is punishment where appropriate, but there is also reward. Look what this administration of justice entails.
      1. The dead will be judged (more on that in later lessons). You reward your servants, the prophets, the saints, and them that fear you name from the least to the greatest (small and great). And you will destroy those who have caused destruction on the earth (NLT)
      2. This agrees with something Jesus said while He was here on earth: (At the end of this age) I, the son of Man, will send my angels, and they will remove from my Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil...then the godly will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom (Matt 13:41-43, NLT).
  4. There is coming a day when the wrath of God will remove all trace of sin and its effects from His creation. At the second coming of Jesus the wrath of God will destroy every trace of the thing that has ravage His creation—sin and its effects. And that's a good thing. Without the wrath of God, there will never be peace or freedom from chaos and pain in this world.
- D. Conclusion: We have a lot more to say in upcoming lessons. And some of the points we've made need further discussion. But consider these points as we close.
1. Jesus is coming to complete the plan of God and make things right. Part of that involves removing what is wrong. This brings up an obvious question: Where does that leave me, because I am wrong?
  2. That's what Jesus' first coming was all about. Through His death, burial, and resurrection He opened the way for you to qualify for God's family and kingdom when you put faith in Him.
    - a. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior you face the Day of Reckoning in Him. This means that you have nothing to fear because justice for you will mean reward. Heb 10:35-37
    - b. I John 4:17—In this [union and communion with Him] love is brought to completion and attains perfection with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment (the day of reckoning—with assurance and boldness to face Him—because as He is, so are we in this world. (Amp)
  3. Lots more next week!