

RECOGNIZE THE TIMES

- A. Introduction: Our country, along with the rest of the world, is experiencing some very challenging events—the covid pandemic and its related economic and social issues, societal unrest due to racial and ethnic tensions, increasing lawlessness, etc. In our current series of lessons we are discussing what is happening and why, according to the Bible, so that we are better prepared to deal with these distressing circumstances.
1. There are a lot of different voices speaking about what is happening and why, as well as what we as Christians should be doing in the face of all these challenges.
 - a. Some say that the church needs to rise up and use our spiritual authority to bring an end to this chaos. Others say that if we humble ourselves and fast and pray, then God will heal our land. Still others say we need to work for social justice as we make this world a better place in the name of the Lord.
 - b. I’m certainly not against Christians using our authority where it is appropriate. Nor am I against praying and fasting or trying to make this world a better place. If you believe that God is telling you to do any or all of the above then you need to do what He has told you.
 - c. However, we are at a unique point in human history. Jesus’ second coming is near, and the Bible informs us that the years leading up to His return will be increasingly chaotic and difficult. We can’t stop it or pray it away.
 2. We must learn how to walk through it in peace and joy. To do this, we must understand that a plan is unfolding. A plan, by definition, has a beginning, middle, and an end.
 - a. 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 (Eph 1:4-5, NLT).
 1. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him. He made earth to be a home for His family. Neither this world nor humanity is as God intended them to be because of sin. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 8:20; etc.
 2. We need to realize that this world as it is will come to an end because it isn’t the way it is supposed to be. “For this world in its present form is passing away” (I Cor 7:31, NIV).
 3. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay for sin and open the way for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters of God. He will come again to complete the plan of God by transforming this world into a fit forever home for God and His family. II Pet 3:10-13
 - b. We must understand that this world can’t be “fixed up” through governmental systems or social programs because the root problem is sin. Because of sin there is a curse of corruption and death, not just in people, but in the earth itself. The only remedy for this curse is the power of God.
 1. We are sojourners who are only passing through this present world as it is. Our life on this planet in its current condition is only a small part of our existence. I Pet 2:11; I Pet 1:17; etc.
 2. The greater and better part of life is ahead, first in the present Heaven and then on this earth after it has been renewed and restored by the transforming power of God. Rom 8:18
 3. God’s primary purpose is not to make this life the highlight of our existence. His main purpose is to gather His family through the preaching of the good news of salvation in Jesus. II Pet 3:15
 - a. And God so big and so great that He is able to use the hard realities of life in a fallen, sin damaged world and cause them to serve His purposes.
 - b. By this, I don’t mean that everything that happens in this world is part of God’s plan. All sorts of things happen in this world that God is not behind or approving of in any way.
 1. I mean that God can cause everything that happens (including what is going on right now in the world) to serve His ultimate purpose, namely, a family of sons and daughters in a perfect world. Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; etc.
 2. The crucifixion of Jesus at His first coming is a spectacular example. Wicked men inspired by

Satan carried out the death of the innocent Son of God (Luke 22:3; Acts 2:23; I Cor 2:8). Yet it didn't take God by surprise and He caused it to serve His ultimate purpose for a family.

- c. God beat the devil at his own game. Through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross our sin was paid for, and all who put faith in Christ can be transformed into sons and daughters of God by His power. John 1:12-13; I John 5:1; etc.
 1. If we could go back in time to the days leading up to the crucifixion, we would never try to convince Jesus' followers to use their authority or fast and pray to stop what was happening. Why? Because it was time for the plan of God to be implemented through the Cross of Christ.
 2. There have been times in the past when it was appropriate for Christians to use their authority and fast and pray to change society for the good, because it wasn't time for the plan to be consummated. But it's now time for the end.
 3. How then should we pray? Lord, raise up laborers and send them into your harvest field. Help people to see You as You truly are and themselves as they truly are in relation to You. Show us how to best represent You to the people around us. Give us wisdom on how to navigate through these difficult times in a godly way. Thank you that You will get us through until You get us out. Thank You for protection and provision.
4. Last week we talked about Hell, the Lake of Fire, and the Second Death (all names for the forever home of those who reject God's offer of salvation from sin through Jesus) and how it fits into the plan of God. I have more points to make, but first, I want to bring it back to the overall plan of God for a family.

B. The Bible has a lot of information about world conditions just prior to Jesus' return. It describes worldwide system of government, economy, and religion that will be presided over by a world leader commonly referred to as the Antichrist. Rev 13:1-18; Dan 7:16-28; etc.

1. He will be a Satan inspired and empowered man through whom the devil will attempt to hold on to his power in this world. The world will welcome, embrace, and worship this man. II Thess 2:4; 9; II Cor 4:4; Rev 12:12; etc.
 - a. Technological advances have linked the world in ways not possible in previous centuries. With these advances has come a move toward globalism, along with the idea that if we work together as a world community we can create Utopia (Heaven on earth). Coupled with this is the idea that we don't need the moral restraints of a judgmental religion like traditional Christianity.
 - b. The United States must decline because, as the world's biggest superpower, it is also the biggest roadblock to globalism. Our current problems may ebb and flow (like birth pangs). But ultimately, the nation will subscribe to globalism. This is a hard fact to accept.
 1. Don't let this discourage you. Recognize the times we're in and realize what is most important—that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus so they can be part of God's family.
 2. The Bible predicted a worldwide system 2,000 years before it was even possible. This should encourage us that we can trust the Word of Almighty God which also predicts a wonderful future for those who know the Lord.
 - c. These prophesied conditions won't come out of a vacuum. They're setting up now and will more and more affect us in negative ways. We must learn how to keep our focus on the big picture.
 1. Jesus said that when you see these things begin to come to pass, be elated in joyous expectation because the completion of the plan is at hand. Luke 21:28
 2. Remember, it's not what you see. It's how you see what you see. It's like labor pains. The birth process isn't pleasant, but you will survive and the end result is worth it.
2. The actions of this final world ruler and the responses of the people of the world to him will produce suffering that, according to Jesus, will be unlike anything the world has ever seen. Matt 24:21
 - a. The tribulation of the last few years of this world as it is will take place because of the behavior of

- people—not because an angry, vengeful God is throwing down on people. II Tim 3:1-5
- b. These types of behaviors are not new to humanity. Human nature was damaged by the fall. As the head of the human race, Adam’s sin affected the entire race resident in him. Man became sinners by nature. Rom 5:19
 1. This change showed itself in the first generation of humans born through natural processes. Adam’s firstborn, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel, and then lied to God about it.
 2. A being created in the image of God for sonship, holiness, and righteousness displayed traits of the devil (John 8:44; I John 3:12). This altered new nature has displayed itself in every generation of humanity since that time.
 - c. Fallen human nature is capable of vile behavior and must be restrained in order for society to function (Jer 17:9; Matt 15:19; Gal 5:19-20; James 4:1-3; etc.). Throughout history there have been restraints on humanity—cultural influences; societal standards, law and government, etc.
 1. But since the counterculture revolution of the sixties, these restraining forces have been progressively eroded, particularly in the western world.
 2. Jesus said that one of the signs that His return is near will be lawlessness or rejection of authority (Matt 24:12). God is the ultimate authority and fallen men hate Him for that reason.
 - A. The final world ruler is referred to as the man of lawlessness. By claiming to be God, He will be the ultimate rejecter of God and His Law. II Thess 2:3; 8
 - B. As the world has increasingly abandoned God (as He is revealed in Jesus) it is leading to increasingly debased behavior and reprobate minds (minds that can’t make decisions in their own best interest). Rom 1:18-32
 3. The Holy Spirit working through the Church has exercised a restraint in the earth for 2,000 years. Just prior to the revealing of the final world ruler, believers will be taken off the earth, removing an additional restraint on human behavior. I Thess 4:13-18; II Thess 2:7
3. Remember how God judges people in this life. He gives them over to the consequences of their behavior (Rom 1:24; 26; 28). Without cultural and societal restraints, and without any godly restraint, fallen human nature will be fully exposed. Consider two points.
 - a. God will cause this period of complete abandonment of all restraint to serve His purposes. Many will realize that humanity needs Him and, as a result, come to saving knowledge of Jesus. Rev 7:9
 - b. Hell is a place of eternal separation from God and His family. The final years of human history in this present world as it is will demonstrate the necessity of such a place for those who refuse to live in submission to God. Without it, there will be no peace in the life to come.
- C. From the beginning of the Bible we see a theme that carries through to the end. There are two groups of people—those who are God’s and those who aren’t—sons of God and sons of the devil I John 3:10
1. Back to Cain and Abel. The Bible refers to Abel as being righteous (Matt 23:35; Heb 11:4). It also says that Cain was of the wicked one (I John 3:12).
 - a. Humanity’s problem is more than what we do. It’s what we are by birth. We’re born into a fallen race and are by nature (lineal descent) children of wrath in whom the devil works. Eph 2:2-3
 - b. When we’re old enough to know better, we express our fallen nature in willful rebellion against our Creator. We become guilty of sin before God and deserving of His wrath. Isa 53:6
 2. Remember what we’ve already covered about God’s wrath. His wrath is not an emotional response. It is a judicial response. Wrath is God’s right and just response to man’s sin.
 - a. The just punishment for sin is death or separation from God who is life. If this penalty is enforced, God loses His family. So God devised a way to satisfy justice, remain true to His holy, righteous nature, and still have His family.
 1. The Lord Jesus Christ was punished in our place. As our substitute, He took the righteous

- penalty of the Law on Himself. The wrath of God due us for our sin went to Jesus. Isa 53:5
2. Because of the value of His person Jesus was able to satisfy justice on our behalf. Because He had no sin of His own, once the price for our sin was paid, death could not hold Him and He was raised up from death, Hell, and the grave. Rom 4:25
- b. Now that sin has been paid for, the way is open for transformation to take place. When a sinner acknowledges Jesus as Lord and accepts His sacrifice at the Cross, God by His life and Spirit indwells that person, changes his nature, and begins the process of making him Christlike in every part of his being (many lessons for another day). Rom 8:29-30
 1. God is not currently dealing with mankind in wrath. He is dealing with them in mercy, giving them a lifetime to repent. Matt 5:45; Luke 6:35; Acts 14:17; II Pet 3:9
 2. John 3:36—If a person does not acknowledge Jesus in this lifetime He faces the wrath of God when he dies. He will be eternally separated from God and the family in a place called Hell, the Lake of Fire, and the Second Death. That is the wrath of God.
3. Yes, some would say, but that doesn't seem fair to those who were born before Jesus died or to those who live in non-Christian countries. Consider these thoughts.
 - a. Remember first of all that sin must be dealt with. Jesus is the only solution to mankind's problem because He is the only propitiation or satisfaction for sin. He is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe. John 14:6; I John 4:10; I Tim 4:10
 1. God forgave sin before the Cross on the basis of what Jesus was going to do at the Cross. He gave grace to all who acknowledged the revelation of Jesus given to their generation—like Abel who walked in the light that he had.
 2. Rom 3:25-26—God sent Jesus to be our sacrifice. Christ offered his life's blood, so that by faith in him we could come to God. And God did this to show that in the past he was right to be patient and forgive sinners. This also shows that God is right when he accepts people who have faith in Jesus (CEV).
 - b. How can a loving God send people to hell when they have never even heard of Jesus? God doesn't "send anyone to Hell". Peoples' sins and their rejection of Jesus send them to hell.
 1. God cares about those people more than you do. He knew each one of them in Adam and in their mother's womb. He knows all their names and He knows how many hairs they have on their head. He is present with each one of them throughout their lifetime. Acts 17:28
 2. God gives them a witness through His creation. He gives them the witness of conscience, an inner knowing that there is right and wrong. Rom 1:20; Rom 2:14-15
 3. The grace of God has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). Jesus lights every man who comes into the world (John 1:9). No one leaves this earth without enough light to respond to God's grace.
 - c. Christianity is both inclusive and exclusive. His offer of salvation from sin is open to all—whosoever believeth. But Jesus is the only way because there is no other name by which men can be saved, no other solution to our nature problem, no other remedy for our guilt. Acts 4:12
- D. Conclusion: We have more to say about all of this. But consider these thoughts as we close for tonight.
1. We must understand the times that we are in. The end of this age is coming and things will get worse before they get better. In the context of human behavior prior to the coming of the Lord the apostle Paul wrote that evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse. But he Paul exhorted Timothy, his son in the faith, to continue in the Word of God. II Tim 3:13-14
 2. The things going on around us are real, but they aren't the end of the story. And they can distract us from the fact that the plan of God is about to be consummated—and that's a good thing. Give your attention to the Truth—God's Word which shows us the way things really are—and not to the chaos all around us.