

## ENCOURAGED BY THE BIG PICTURE

- A. Introduction: The end of this age of human history is at hand and the return of Jesus Christ to this world is near. The Bible predicts great tribulation on earth just prior to the Lord's return (Matt 24:21-22; etc.). The world is experiencing increasingly troubling times, and things are going to get worse before they get better.
1. We need to know how to respond to the rising chaos in a way that gives us peace and joy in the midst of the trouble and enables us to brightly shine the light of Jesus in this dark world. To do this, we must understand what is happening and why. That has been our topic for a number of weeks.
    - a. We've made the point that the calamity of these years does not come from God, but rather the behavior of people. In this final period of human history the wickedness of man without the influence of God or societal restraints will be demonstrated as never before. II Tim 3:1-5
    - b. We noted that Jesus compared some of the events preceding His return to birth pains, letting us know that we have to keep the end result in mind. Matt 24:6-8
      1. When a woman goes into labor, we understand that the pain of the process will worsen before it gets better. But because we know that the end result will be wonderful, we're able to deal with the labor because we see it in light of the final outcome—the birth of a baby.
      2. Therefore, we are working on learning to look at the present chaos in this world in terms of the final outcome. We can rejoice because there is a good end ahead for all who know the Lord.
  2. The world the way that it is isn't the way it's supposed to be and it is coming to an end. But that's a good thing because what is ahead is better. Almighty God will renew and restore this world, with no more toil, pain, or loss. Life will finally be what it was always supposed to be. Rom 8:18; Rev 21:4
    - a. God is working out His plan for a family. Remember, He created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him, and He fashioned this world to be a home for Himself and His family. However, both have been damaged by sin. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19
    - b. Jesus came to earth two thousand years ago to pay for sin and open the way for all who believe on Him to be transformed from sinners into sons and daughters of God. He will come again to cleanse and transform the earth and restore it to a fit forever home for the family. Heb 9:26; II Pet 3:10-12
  3. We begin tonight's lesson by revisiting a passage we looked at a number of weeks ago because it gives us important insight into what we need to do as times grow worse. Heb 10:25
    - a. These words were written to Jewish believers in Jesus who were experiencing increasing pressure from their fellow countrymen to reject the Lord and return to Temple worship. The whole purpose of this epistle was to urge these people to stay faithful to Jesus no matter what.
    - b. In that context the author directed them to exhort each other as they see the day approaching. "The day" is what we call the second coming. This term didn't yet exist in the way that we use it today. First century believers referred to Jesus' return as the day of the Lord or day of Christ. II Thess 2:1
      1. The term day of the Lord came from the Old Testament prophets who used it to refer to a future day or time when the Lord will come to deal with the ungodly, deliver His people, and then live among them. Joel 2:1; 11; 28-31; Zeph 1:14; etc.
      2. How would encouraging themselves with the fact that Jesus is coming back help these people in the midst difficult circumstances? Because there is a hope and an excitement that comes from expecting the Lord's return to complete God's plan.
      3. This hope will sustain you in the midst of your circumstances. Imagine what it can do for us now as the birth pains begin to intensify? Can you imagine what it will do for you if, in the face of the chaos around us, you encourage yourself with the big picture?
    - c. Note one other point. The Bible was written by real people to other real people about real issues. There is a political and societal background to this epistle (lots of lessons for another day).
      1. The Jewish people were about to rebel against the Roman Empire. This rebellion would

ultimately lead to the destruction of their nation. Every Jew (those who accepted Jesus as Messiah and those who didn't) had to decide if they would join in the rebellion—including the people to whom the epistle to the Hebrews was written. Jewish believers chose not to participate in the rebellion and were considered traitors to their nation.

2. Notice that this epistle has no political advice in it. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't participate in the political arena in our country.
3. It's about recognizing that our hope is not in a political party or leader. Our hope is in Jesus and the completion of God's plan for a family in a perfectly restored world.

B. These first followers of Jesus lived with the consciousness that the world is not going to go on forever as it is because it isn't the way it's supposed to be due to sin. This gave them hope in the face of hardship.

1. Matt 19:27-29—About a year before Jesus went to the Cross, Peter asked Jesus what he and the other apostles would receive for having left all to follow him. What shall be our reward (Weymouth)?
  - a. Jesus wasn't upset with the question. In fact, He answered it. Jesus told Peter and the others that they will receive over and above what they gave up. (That is the meaning of the phrase hundred fold—not, give a dollar get a hundred back.) And this time, you will keep it forever.
  - b. Jesus said that their reward will come in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory. Jesus didn't have to explain what regeneration meant because they knew from the prophets. Jesus meant the coming time when the world is restored to pre-Eden conditions.
    1. Truly I say unto you, in the new age—the Messianic rebirth of the world, you will be rewarded (v28, Amp); at the time when all things shall be restored to their pristine glory (v28, Wuest).
    2. Regeneration is made up of two Greek words that mean birth and again (*paliggenesia*). The word is used two times in the New Testament, once for the new birth where a man receives life from God (Titus 3:5) and right here for the restoration and renewing of the earth (Matt 19:28).
      - A. Remember the plan: to restore the family and the family home by the power of God.
      - B. Remember also, this doesn't mean that the present Heaven isn't wonderful or that it isn't a place of reward. But it is temporary. God's plan is that all who are in Heaven be reunited with their bodies raised from the grave to live on earth again—after it is restored.
  - c. Peter and the others knew that the regeneration will take place when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory. The prophet Daniel was the first to write about this event.
    1. Daniel was given a lot of information about world conditions just before to the second coming of Jesus. He saw a final world leader and empire that will oppose the Lord and His people prior to the regeneration. John reported the same thing in the Book of Revelation. Rev 13:1-18
    2. In Dan 7:9-14 Daniel saw the judgment of this final world ruler and his followers. Almighty God (the Ancient of Days) sat down to judge. The Son of Man (Jesus) approached Him and was given the authority to bring this final kingdom to an end and establish His eternal kingdom.
  - d. Jesus' disciples had no idea at this time the full price that they were going to pay for following Jesus or the hardships they would endure. But the hope of what is ahead would sustain them.
    1. In Peter's first recorded sermon he told his listeners that Jesus will return when it is time for the complete restoration of all things. Acts 3:21
    2. In his last words, written shortly before he was executed for his faith by crucifixion, Peter wrote that the new heaven and new earth awaited him. II Pet 3:13
2. At some point Jesus made it clear to His apostles that He was not at that time going to renew the earth and establish His visible kingdom here.
  - a. Matt 24:1-3—Just a few days before Jesus was crucified Peter, Andrew, John, and James asked the Lord what sign will indicate His return and the end of this age is near. Their question was in response to the fact that Jesus had just told them that the Temple would be completely destroyed.

- b. Note that although Jesus gave them catastrophic news, they weren't upset by His words. They knew from the Word of God (the prophets) that His coming to restore the world will be preceded by a time of calamity centering on Jerusalem. Zech 14:1-3; Dan 12:1; Joel 2:31-32; etc.
  - c. I Pet 1:5—Many years after this incident Peter, writing to Christians who were experiencing increasing harassment for their faith that would soon become full blown governmental persecution, reminded them that the Lord will keep them by His power until He comes again.
- C. Jesus' first followers were not frightened by the prospect of increasing calamity and tribulation leading up to the Lord's return like many of us are because they understood the big picture or the overall plan of God. And they knew that He will get His people through until He gets them out of whatever is ahead.
1. Luke 4:16-21—Near the beginning of His public ministry Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath Day. (Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth.) During the meeting Jesus stood up and read from the Book of Isaiah the prophet (Isa 6:1:1-3).
    - a. When Jesus finished reading, He pronounced the passage fulfilled in their ears (v21). In other words, Jesus said, I am the one the prophet is speaking about. Only the Psalms contain more prophecies about Jesus than Isaiah. This is one of Isaiah's prophecies.
    - b. There are many points we could make about how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's words, but consider one for now. When we look at the actual prophecy in Isaiah we find that Jesus was anointed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God. Isa 61:2
      1. The Old Testament prophets were not clearly shown that there would be two comings of the Lord separated by what we now know is at least two thousand years.
      2. Unbeknownst to them, many of their prophecies about Jesus make reference to both the first and second coming of Jesus in the same passage. Isa 61:1-2 is an example. The acceptable year of the Lord refers to Jesus' first coming and the day of vengeance refers to His second coming.
    - c. Luke ended his account of Jesus' reading with the purpose of His first coming. Both the Hebrew and the Greek words that are translated acceptable have the same basic meaning—God's good will extended to humanity; His time of favor.
      1. Luke 4:19—To proclaim the accepted and acceptable year of the Lord—the day when salvation and the free favors of God profusely abound (Luke 4:19, Amp)
      2. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin and make it possible for sinners to become sons of God through faith in Him. Through His death Jesus opened the way for us into God's favor.
        - A. Eph 1:6—(Through the Cross God) would manifest the splendor of that grace by which he has taken us into his favour in the person of his beloved Son (Knox).
        - B. God, through His grace demonstrated at the Cross, provides us with the righteousness necessary to become part of His family. Rom 5:1-2
  2. Isa 61:2 also states the purpose of the second coming: to proclaim the day of the vengeance of our God. The Hebrew word means to avenge or to be avenged. Those familiar with the writings of the prophets understood it to mean that God will judge His enemies and that will mean redemption for His people.
    - a. In II Thess 1:6-9 Paul wrote that when the Lord returns He will take vengeance on those who have refused to believe in Him. The Greek word translated vengeance means to carry out justice. It can be translated judgment.
    - b. Notice the context in which Paul made his statement. He was writing to a church (located in the Greek city of Thessalonica) that was experiencing serious persecution for their faith in Christ. Paul wrote to encourage them to stay faithful to the Lord no matter what.
      1. Note what Paul wrote: II Thess 1:6-7—And in his justice he will punish those who persecute you. And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the

Lord appears from heaven (NLT).

2. Remember what we've said in previous lessons. Justice is about doing what is right. It is right to punish evil and right to reward good.
  - A. Jesus, in His first coming, took the punishment due to fallen humanity on Himself at the Cross. All who believe on Him and His work have been accepted into God's favor.
  - B. Those who have refused the Lord's offer of favor through His grace will be forever separated from Him, His family, and the family home in the day of His vengeance (justice).
3. Sincere Christians are frightened by what they read in the Book of Revelation about and judgment (vengeance) and wrath (God's right and just response to sin) because they don't consider how the first readers would have understood it.
  - a. For example, Rev 14:14-20 makes reference to harvesting the earth and describes the Lord and His angels thrusting sickles into the earth and casting the harvest into the winepress of God's wrath.
    1. John's first readers would have heard this in terms of Isa 63:1-6 which speaks of the Lord coming to announce Israel's salvation. His garments are stained red as if He had been treading out grapes. He states that He has in fact trodden down Israel's enemies because the time has come to ransom His people in the day of vengeance (Isa 61:2 is two chapters away from this).
    2. The first readers would have known from Joel 3:1-2; 12-17 that all nations will be gathered to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. (This was a historical reference to an actual place where the united enemies of Israel were overthrown by God's power, II Chron 20:26).
      - A. Joel used the imagery figuratively as the place where the judgment of the final world ruler and his forces will take place in the Day of the Lord. Decision means threshing or a harvesting process (v14).
      - B. Remember that Jesus told His disciples that at the end of this age the angels will remove all that is sinful, all that corrupts, from His kingdom—and that is a good thing. It's part of the process of restoring the family home. Matt 13:41-43
  - b. We need to make a comment about Rev 14:20. John saw the grapes (the wicked) trodden outside the city (Jerusalem) and blood ran for 200 miles, up to the height of a horse's bridle.
    1. We've made this point in previous lessons. The horrors of these final years of human history don't come from God. When people choose to reject Him He gives them over to the consequences of their choices. Rom 1:24, 26, 28
    2. Just prior to the Lord's return the entire world will embrace and worship a final world leader (Antichrist). This man will draw the nations of the world into the worst war the world has ever seen—a nuclear, chemical, and biological holocaust, WWII or Armageddon (Rev 16:14-16).
    3. John saw a glimpse of it here. This verse is a strong indicator of nuclear war. We now know that blood exposed to intense radiation (a by-product of nuclear war) doesn't coagulate.
- D. Conclusion: As always, we have much more to say next week. But for now, remember these points.
  1. When it comes to the second coming of Jesus we have a tendency to focus on individual people and events mentioned particularly in Revelation—much of which is not yet fully clear to us. And, we miss the encouragement that comes from focusing on the big picture, the end result, the actual birth.
  2. Because there is so much chaos around us and because we have 24 hour instant access to news it's easy to get consumed with what is happening in our country. It's very disturbing. There's nothing wrong with staying informed, but too much of it will rob you of peace and joy.
  3. Remember what is important. It's not about winning people over to your particular political point of view. It's about shining the light of Jesus to the people around you and demonstrating the hope we have because there's a good end in sight.