

ELATED IN JOYOUS EXPECTATION

- A. Introduction: For several months we've been talking about the importance of thanking and praising God, even in the face of life's struggles and hardships. Last week we added another element to our discussion.
1. We talked about Christians who experienced persecution (ridicule, beatings, jail, property loss) and then looked at two men (Habakkuk and Jeremiah) who saw the destruction of life as they knew it—their nation literally destroyed. Heb 10:32-34; Habakkuk 3:18-19; Jer 29:11; Lam 3:18-26
 - a. All of these people were able to rejoice (thank and praise God) in the midst of it because they knew that there is more to life than just this life, and that the greater and better part of our existence is after this life—first in Heaven and then on this earth after the Lord renews and restores it.
 - b. To have this kind of perspective you must see the big picture. This is the big picture: God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him, and He made the earth to be home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 1. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin, beginning with Adam's original act of disobedience in Eden.
 2. Humans became sinners by nature (disqualified for sonship), and the earth was infused with a curse of corruption and death. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 - A. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin through His death on the Cross. His sacrifice opened the way for men and women to be restored to their created purpose as sons and daughters of God through faith in Him.
 - B. Jesus will come again to complete the plan of God by cleansing the earth of all corruption and death and restoring it to a fit forever home for God and His family.
 3. The Bible begins with God on earth with His family, walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the beautiful home he made for them (Gen 2-3). The Bible ends with God on earth with His family, with every trace of sin, corruption, and death forever removed (Rev 21-22).
 2. The second coming of Jesus is approaching, and the Bible makes it clear that perilous times will precede His return. Things are going to get much worse in this world before they get better. To make it through the months and years ahead, we must learn to keep our eyes on the big picture and acknowledge God (thank and praise Him continually) no matter what we see or feel. We have more to say tonight.
- B. Following His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus remained on earth for forty more days. During that period, Jesus “appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive” (Acts 1:3, NLT). And, on these occasions He talked to His men about the kingdom of God.
1. Then, just over five weeks after Jesus rose from the dead, He and His men walked from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, a little less than a mile from the city.
 - a. Mount of Olives is a broad term for four hills east of Jerusalem. The two central hills, opposite the Temple area, are especially known as the Mount of Olives.
 - b. When the group reached Olivet, Jesus rose up in front of them and disappeared into a cloud. As they strained their eyes to see Him, two men in white robes appeared among them with Jesus' first message: Just as you've seen Jesus go back to Heaven, in like manner, He will return. Acts 1:9-11
 2. The return of Jesus to this world is a key doctrine (teaching) of the Bible. Only the doctrine of salvation is mentioned more often than the second coming of Jesus.
 - a. This makes sense because Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan of salvation, His plan to redeem (deliver) men and women and the earth from bondage to sin, corruption, and death.
 - b. The term second coming of Jesus is not found in Scripture, although it is appropriate because His return will be His second time on earth. Second coming is a broad term that includes a number of events which occur over a period of time.

1. People have a tendency to focus on individual events such as the rapture, the tribulation, and the Antichrist and miss the overall purpose of the second coming.
2. Because they don't consider these individual events and topics in terms of the big picture or God's plan for humanity, they draw wrong conclusions that produce fear instead of hope.
- c. The phrase end times is also not found in the Bible. Instead, the term last days or last or latter times is applied to the years leading up to Christ's return (I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 3:1; I John 4:18). The last days actually began with Jesus' first coming (Acts 2:15-21).
 1. At the Cross Jesus activated the plan of redemption by paying for sin, which makes it possible for men and women to become God's sons and daughters through faith in Him. The last days will culminate with Jesus' return.
 2. Some of the New Testament authors also referred to the Lord's return as the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is an Old Testament name for what we call the second coming (I Thess 5:2; II Pet 3:10; Joel 1:15; Isaiah 13:6). The term refers to a time of judgment that will precede the restoration of the world (lessons for another day).
3. The second coming of Jesus is part of the gospel message. The first Christians lived with the awareness that Jesus is coming back to complete the plan of redemption.
 - a. The return of Jesus is mentioned in 23 of the 27 New Testament books and letters. (Three of the documents that don't mention His return are short, personal letters—Philemon, II John, III John.)
 - b. The soon return of Jesus Christ was an essential part of the message that Jesus' eyewitnesses (the apostles) preached.
 1. In one of Peter's earliest sermons preached shortly after Jesus returned to Heaven, the apostle made this statement: Acts 3:21—(Jesus) will remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through His prophets (NLT).
 2. In AD 51 Paul established a community of believers in the Greek city of Thessalonica. He was only in the city for a few weeks when he was forced out by persecution.
 - A. Paul later wrote them a letter in which (among other things) he summarized the message he had proclaimed to them during his short stay: Turn from idols (repent), serve the Living and True God (believe), and live expectantly awaiting Jesus' return. I Thess 1:9-10
 - B. The fact that Paul was only in Thessalonica for three or four weeks, yet proclaimed the return of Jesus reveals that it is not a side issue. It's a key part of the gospel.
 3. Titus 2:11-13—Paul wrote to Titus (one of his sons in the faith), whom he placed in charge of churches on the island of Crete. Paul summarized the message he urged Titus to preach.
 - A. God's grace has been revealed to all men and teaches us to turn from sin and live lives that glorify God while we await and look for "the [fulfillment, the realization of our] blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus" (v13, Amp).
 - B. This is our hope. Jesus is coming to complete God's plan of redemption. To look for Him means to await His coming with confidence or patience.
 1. Sadly, for Christians today, mention of the second coming of Jesus sets off arguments about the identity of the Antichrist and the mark of the beast, the timing of the rapture, and who will and won't go through the tribulation.
 2. We miss the blessing and hope that comes from knowing that Jesus is coming back because we don't see the big picture or consider topics in terms of the big picture.
4. The Bible is very clear that Jesus' second coming will be preceded by some extremely challenging times and events on this earth (upcoming lessons).
 - a. Jesus Himself said that there will be tribulation unlike anything that the world has ever seen. If those events are not stopped by His return, the human race will be wiped out. Matt 24:21-22
 - b. Luke 21:28—In the context of this coming catastrophe Jesus also said that when these events begin

to unfold, His followers should look up and lift up your heads for redemption is near. Luke 21:28

1. To look and up and lift up, in original Greek language, means to be elated in joyous expectation (*Vine's Dictionary*).
2. Luke 21:28—Now, when these things are beginning to take place, be elated and lift up your heads because your deliverance is imminent (Wuest); stand ready and look forward cheerfully because you will soon be set free (Beck).
3. How can we be elated in joyous expectation when things are going to get worse? One, because we know the end result: This world will be restored to pre-sin conditions and all the hell and heartache, pain, suffering, and loss that has plagued humanity since man's earliest days will be forever removed. Two, because we know that God will get us through until he gets us out.

C. What did Jesus' second coming mean to the first Christians and the eyewitnesses who wrote the New Testament documents? All the books in the Bible were written by real people to other real people to convey important information. To accurately interpret any verse we must consider these things.

1. Remember, that for first century Jews (the people group Jesus was born in to) their view of reality was shaped by the Law, the prophets, and the psalms (what we now call the Old Testament).
 - a. These people knew that mankind, the earth, and life on earth are not as they should be. All of it has been damaged by sin. They also knew that since the time that sin, corruption, and death entered the world, God has been promising to come and make things right through a Redeemer. Gen 3:15
 1. The following statement is found in one of the earliest books of the Bible: I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end he will stand on the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, in my body I'll still see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes. I'll see him and he won't be a stranger to me. How my heart longs for that day (Job 19:25-27, NIRV).
 2. God has gradually revealed His plan of redemption through the pages of Scripture. The Old Testament prophets and writers weren't clearly shown that there would be two separate coming of Jesus separated by at least two thousand years—first to die for the sins of the world and then to cleanse and renew the earth and establish the visible kingdom of God here.
 - b. But first century people had a record of what was revealed plan up to that point. The prophets revealed that the Redeemer will come and cleanse and restore men and women and the earth as He establishes His kingdom on earth. Isa 51:3; Ezek 36:33-36; Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27; etc.
2. At some point toward the end of His earth ministry Jesus revealed to His apostles that He was soon going to return to Heaven, but would return to restore the earth and establish His visible kingdom here.
 - a. Matt 24:1-3—Two days before Jesus was crucified, as He and His disciples came out of the Temple in Jerusalem, He told them that the Temple was going to be destroyed.
 1. Notice that even though Jesus just told them that the center of their religious, social, cultural, and political systems was going to be destroyed, they weren't disturbed..
 2. They simply asked Him: When will this happen and what will be the signs of your coming and of the end of the world. The Greek word translated world means age—What will be the sign of your coming and of the end—that is the completion, the consummation—of the age (v3, Amp).
 3. These men understood from the Old Testament documents that the age or era in which they were living (creation in bondage to sin, Satan, corruption, and death) would end with the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth and this world restored to pre-sin conditions.
 - b. The prophets foresaw that there will be a time of great trouble on the earth prior to the establishment of God's kingdom. Jesus' apostles no doubt presumed that the Temple destruction Jesus referred to would happen in connection with these events.
 1. However, they were not frightened by what Jesus said because they knew—according to the Word of God—that they would make it through whatever was ahead.

2. The prophets all prophesied that those who remain faithful to the Lord will be preserved unto His kingdom. Dan 11:40-45; Dan 12:1-2; Joel 2:28-32; Zech 14:1-9; Jer 23:5-6; etc.
 - A. Jesus then gave them signs that will warn the generation that will see His return that His coming is imminent. The disciples no doubt thought that they would be that generation.
 - B. Many years later, in the context of the Lord's return, Peter (who was present that day when Jesus talked about the destruction of the Temple) said that we will be kept (guarded) by God's power through our faith or trust in Him. I Pet 1:5
 - c. Matt 24:4-8—Jesus answered their question by listing a number of things that will precede His return. Among them are religious deception, wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, and pestilence (or plague—epidemic disease that causes a high rate of mortality).
 1. Jesus compared the signs of His return to birth pangs or labor pains—With all these things the birth pangs of the new age begin (v8, NEB).
 - A. Labor pains start out light and far apart but they increase in frequency and intensity as the birth nears. Labor pains aren't pleasant. But no one freaks out when they begin because they understand what's happening.
 - B. A process is underway that will get worse before it gets better, but the end result is wonderful—the birth of a baby. And, the mother will survive the labor pains.
 2. The world is beginning to experience labor pains or birth pangs. A monumental change is coming to this world. We're on the verge of something really big and really good. But hard times will precede that change.
 3. The Bible gives much information about world conditions prior to Jesus' return (upcoming lessons). Those conditions won't come out of a vacuum. They are setting up even now. We must be prepared.
- D. Conclusion: Jesus' return is fast approaching. In the face of the perilous times that will precede His return, we must learn to thank and praise God continually. We must learn how to be elated in joyous expectation.
1. II Tim 3:1; 13-14—In the context of the chaos preceding the Lord's return, Paul urged Timothy (his son in the faith) to continue in the Scriptures. They not only tell us why we can be elated in joyous expectation, God's Word will help us navigate through the months and years ahead (upcoming lessons).
 - a. A plan is unfolding, a plan with a good end. Knowledge of that plan helps us understand what is happening and why, and it gives us hope in the midst of the chaos.
 - b. Remember the prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk. They were able to rejoice in the face of national destruction because they knew there's more to life than just this life.
 2. Jesus Christ is coming back to complete God's plan for a family with whom He will live forever on this earth, renewed and restored—with all trace of sin, corruption, and death gone forever.
 - a. Eph 1:9-10—He showed us the mystery of his plan. It was in keeping with what he wanted to do. It was what he had planned through Christ. It will all come about when history has been completed. God will then bring together all things in heaven and on earth under one ruler. The ruler is Christ (NIrV).
 - b. Col 1:19-20—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 fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross (The Message Bible).
 3. If ever there was a time to be a Bible reader, it's now. If ever there was a time to develop the habit of continually thanking and praising God, it's now. We truly can be elated in joyous expectation because the best is yet to come for those who know the Lord. Much more next week!