

FALSE CHRISTS

- A. Introduction: We have begun a series on the second coming of Jesus. Second coming is a broad term that includes a number of events which take place over a period of time.
1. People have a tendency to focus on individual events and miss the big picture or why Jesus is returning. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for a family in a world free from pain, sorrow, and death.
 - a. The world in its present condition is not the way God created or intended it to be because of sin, beginning with the first man, Adam. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross. Jesus opened the way for sinners to be restored to God's the family through faith in Him.
 2. Jesus will come again to cleanse the earth of all corruption and death and restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22
 - b. When Jesus returns He will complete the plan of redemption (God's plan to deliver the family and the family home from sin, corruption, and death). He will bring full salvation to this world— resurrection of the dead and restoration of the earth. Our bodies will be made immortal and incorruptible so we can live forever on this earth renewed and restored. Heb 9:26-28; I Pet 1:5
 2. The Bible makes it clear that the years leading up to Jesus' return will be perilous. There will be tribulation on the earth like nothing ever seen before. Matt 24:21; II Tim 3:1
 - a. But the Bible reveals that the first Christians (the people who were alive when Jesus was here the first time) were not afraid of the coming troubles. They lived in joyous expectation of the return of Jesus. They knew that they would get through whatever troubles precede His coming.
 - b. We are taking time to look at what the eyewitnesses, the men who knew Jesus and walked and talked with Him (eyewitnesses) thought about the second coming. We have more to say tonight.
- B. Jesus was born into first century AD Israel. Israel knew from the writings of their prophets (the Old Testament) that the Messiah (the Lord's Anointed) was coming to establish God's visible kingdom on earth, restore the world to pre-sin conditions, and live with His people forever. Dan 2:44; Dan 7:29
1. When Jesus came on the scene proclaiming that the kingdom is at hand, many in Israel were persuaded that He was indeed the promised Messiah (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus chose twelve men to be His apostles and, for three and a half years, poured into them the good news of the coming kingdom (Matt 10:1-4).
 - a. As the time approached for Jesus to be crucified, rise from the dead, and return to Heaven, He began to prepare His men for the fact that He was soon going to leave them, without establishing a visible kingdom. But, He assured them that He would return. John 13:33; 36; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11
 - b. Two days before Jesus was crucified He and His apostles were at the Temple in Jerusalem. As they were leaving, Jesus told them that the entire complex was going to be destroyed. Matt 24:1-2
 1. The apostles weren't upset by Jesus' statement. The men knew from the prophets that, prior to the Lord's coming, "there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came in to existence" (Dan 12:1, NLT). They presumed that is when the Temple would be destroyed.
 2. The apostles also knew from that same verse that "at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued" (Dan 12:1, NLT). The apostles expected to make it through whatever tribulation came upon their land and have a part and a place in God's kingdom on earth.
 - A. A quick note about "the book". This was a familiar cultural reference. At God's direction, the Jewish people kept detailed genealogies of their family and tribal lines.
 - B. When Israel was camped at Mount Sinai after leaving Egypt, Moses organized these records into "God's book". Anyone who broke the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai would be blotted out of this book and not permitted to enter Canaan. Ex 32:32

C. To be in the book is a figure of speech that means you are part of God's people, in relationship, in covenant with Him.

c. After Jesus made His statement about the Temple being destroyed, several apostles asked Him: When will all this take place? And will there be any sign ahead of time to signal your return and the end of the world (Matt 24:3, NLT).

1. The Greek word that is translated world (*aion*) means age. This word refers to a period of time marked, not by length of time but by spiritual or moral characteristics. We are in the age when things aren't the way they are supposed to be because of sin. This age is going to come to an end when Jesus returns to complete God's plan of redemption.

2. Jesus answered His apostles by giving a number of signs that will indicate His return is near. The first one He mentioned was massive religious deception—specifically false christs who proclaim a false Christianity. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24-25

3. These false christs, prophets, and teachers won't be wild-eyed, crazy people. Paul the apostle later wrote that they will be appealing people who have departed from (left) the faith. They will follow seducing (beguiling) spirits and teach doctrines they received from devils. I Tim 4:1 2. To understand what is going to happen we first need to know that there is an unseen, counterfeit, usurper kingdom in operation in the earth. (To usurp means to seize and hold by force or without right.)

a. This kingdom is presided over by Satan, a created being who led an angelic rebellion against God. It spread to earth when Satan enticed Adam and Eve to join him in rebellion by disobeying God. (We discussed this in more detail in lesson #1185—REDEMPTION COMPLETED).

b. Satan is called the god (ruler, prince) of this world (II Cor 4:4; John 12:31; John 14:30; etc.). The Greek word translated world (*kosmos*) is used in several ways in the Bible. In these verses it refers to the present condition of human affairs in alienation from and opposition to God. Satan presides over a kingdom on this earth that is in opposition to Almighty God.

1. Jesus defeated Satan at the Cross (Col 2:15), but Satan has not yet been subjugated (forced to submit to control and governance). He still has power (authority) over those who are in his kingdom.

2. All who are guilty of sin, and have not received remission of sin through faith in Christ, are in Satan's kingdom and under his power (Col 1:13). John the apostle wrote: We know that... the world around us is under the power of the evil one (I John 5:19, NLT);

3. Paul made this statement to remind believers what they were before they acknowledged Jesus: Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins. You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the Spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God (Eph 2:1-2, NLT).

3. Satan is going to attempt to hold onto his kingdom and prevent the rightful King, the Lord Jesus Christ, from returning to this world. Prior to the Lord's return, Satan will offer the world a false Messiah, an anti or in place of Christ. The world will welcome this final ruler and accept him as God.

a. This man will preside over a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion. The activities of this man and the responses of the world to him will produce the chaos and tribulation of the final years leading up to Jesus' return. Rev 13; Dan 7:17-25; Dan 8:23-25

1. II Thess 2:9-10—This evil man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles. He will use every kind of wicked deception to fool those who are on their way to destruction because they refuse to believe the truth that would save them (NLT).

2. II Thess 2:3—He will exalt himself and defy every god there is and tear down every object of adoration and worship. He will position himself in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God (NLT).

b. Those last two statements come from an epistle that Paul wrote to Christians living in the Greek city

of Thessalonica in AD 51. Paul established the church, but was forced to leave after only three weeks when persecution broke out.

1. After Paul left, questions arose in the church about the Lord's return. Paul wrote I and II Thessalonians in part to address those issues. Among other things, someone told these people that the day of the Lord (a name for the second coming at that time) had begun.

2. Paul assured them that the day of the Lord had not yet begun: Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God, and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction (II Thess 2:3, NLT).

A. The Greek word translated rebellion in this verse (*apostasee*) is from a word that means to depart. It is a form of the word Paul used in I Tim 4:1 (some will depart from the faith).

B. The Greek word means a defection from the truth. To defect means to desert a cause or belief (*Webster's Dictionary*). We get the English word apostasy from this Greek word.

Apostasy is the renunciation or abandonment of a religious faith (*Webster's Dictionary*).

C. Prior to the Lord's return multitudes will turn away from orthodox Christianity—what Jesus and the apostles taught. Orthodox is from two Greek words that mean right opinion.

C. Even now we are witnessing the development and rapid growth of a false Christianity, an apostate church that will eagerly welcome the final world ruler, the ultimate false Christ. The internet exposes multitudes of people to its influence.

1. The fact that this new form of Christianity is not only present, but growing rapidly, is an indication that we are in the season of the Lord's return. Remember, first sign Jesus gave that His return is near is the rise of false christs who deceive many.

2. This new form of apostate Christianity seems much more loving and non-judgmental, and accuses traditional (orthodox) Christianity of being a bigoted, homophobic, racist, and misogynist religion.

a. According to these teachers, it doesn't matter what you believe or how you live your life, as long as you're sincere and trying to be a good person. After all, God is inclusive and there are many paths to God. It's all about love.

b. This developing church denies basic doctrines (teachings) of the Christian faith and believes that much of the Bible shouldn't be taken literally. When it does use Bible verses, they are taken completely out of context.

3. It is becoming increasingly common to hear people make statements like the following about Jesus. All of them are false, but they sound right—if you don't know what the Bible says.

a. Jesus just wants us to love each other (a false statement). The truth, according to the Bible, is that Jesus wants men and women to repent (change the direction of their lives toward Him) and believe the gospel—the good news that He died for our sins on the Cross. Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14-15

b. Jesus came to bring peace to this world (a false statement). The truth, according to the Bible, is that Jesus Himself said: Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth (Matt 10:34, NLT).

1. No, I came to bring a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (Matt 10:35-36, NLT).

2. With this statement, Jesus was preparing people for the fact that if they choose to follow Him it will put them at odds with those who reject Him.

c. Jesus tells us not to judge (a false statement). The truth, according to the Bible is that Jesus tells how to judge. To judge means to decide whether something is right or wrong. We must judge or make such decisions about what is right and what is wrong. We judge based on what God says is right or wrong. We are not to judge from a position of superiority or hypocrisy. Matt 7:1-4

4. This new form of Christianity says that the primary purpose of the church is to improve society, and that we must work hard to end poverty, homelessness, hunger, inequality, injustice, crime, and war, etc.

a. However, that is not the mission of the church. This doesn't mean we should not have compassion on those who are suffering, or that we shouldn't try to mitigate suffering when we can.

1. But those issues (hunger, war, injustice, etc.) are not the world's true problem. The world's real problem is sin. All men are guilty of sin before a holy God and cut off from God. And, even if we could solve the world's woes, men are still dead in their sin and on their way to

eternal separation from God.

A. The Great Commission given to us by Jesus is not: feed the hungry, stop war, end poverty, fix the social, political, and economic problems in society.

B. We are to preach the gospel or good news that because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sinful men can be reconciled to God. Mark 16:15-18; I Cor 15:1-4

2. It's hard not to feel the pressure that we've got to fix the system. But it can't be fixed because the root problem is sin and the resulting curse of corruption and death that affected all of creation, along with the counterfeit kingdom of darkness that influences this world.

A. I'm not saying that there haven't been times in the past where working for change and reform in a world institution was right and appropriate.

B. But it will take supernatural transformation by the power of God at the return of Jesus to make this world right. And we need to recognize the times. The end of this age is at hand. The most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus. b.

There are two kinds of deception. With one type, you believe a lie that leads to you abandon Jesus. If the devil can't persuade you to reject Jesus for another God (or no God), the next best thing is to get you to believe something that makes you ineffective for the kingdom of God.

1. If all you can talk about is how terrible the government is and how we've been lied to by authorities, or if you're driving passion is to convince people to see politics as you do and vote like you, then you will not be effective at proclaiming the gospel to people.

2. People come to saving knowledge of Jesus through hearing the Word of God, not the word of politicians and political opinions. There's nothing wrong with having your own opinion on various matters or believing that you are right and someone else is not.

3. But you must keep your priorities straight. The most important thing is not that you persuade them to vote like you do. The most important thing is to show Jesus to them.

D. Conclusion: There is a cosmic battle underway in this world as the prince of this world attempts to hold on to his kingdom. The principle strategy and weaponry of this counterfeit kingdom is deception. To be deceived means to believe a lie. This world is presently under the sway of Satan, the father of lies. John 8:44

1. No where does the Bible tell us to beware of the devil's power. It tells us to beware of his mental strategies. He presents us with lies in an attempt to influence our behavior. Eph 6:11-12

a. The protection from and antidote for deception is Truth. Truth is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who reveals Himself in and through the pages of Scripture. John 14:6; John 17:17

b. If ever there was a time to know who Jesus is, why He came to earth, and what He is doing in the earth now—according to the Bible—it's now. Knowing who Jesus is, is much more important than figuring out who the Antichrist is.

1. A false Christianity is well underway. Are you able to recognize a false christ or a false gospel? Can you recognize whether a preacher or teacher is using a Bible verse in context—or are they making it say something it doesn't say?

2. Treasury agents tasked with stopping counterfeiters spend their time looking at genuine bills until they are so familiar with them that they can instantly recognize a fake.

2. As the end of this age approaches we need to focus our attention on Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible so that we can instantly recognize false christs and false gospels. More next week!!