

LAWLESSNESS

- A. Introduction: We are working on a series about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for a family in a world that is free from pain, sorrow, and death.
1. Neither this world nor humanity, in its present condition, is the way God created or intended them to be because of sin. When the first man (Adam) sinned, human nature was corrupted and the physical world was infused with a curse of corruption and death. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; etc.
 - a. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him and made the earth to be a home for His family. Because of sin, men and women are disqualified for sonship, and the earth is filled with hardship, pain, suffering, and death.
 - b. Almighty God devised a plan to undo the damage done by sin and restore humankind and the earth. This plan is called redemption, and Jesus is the Redeemer who makes this deliverance possible.
 1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin through His death on the Cross, and open the way for men and women to be transformed into God's sons and daughters through faith in Him.
 2. He will come again to restore the earth to a fit forever home for God's family. When Jesus returns, He will cleanse the earth of all corruption and death, establish His kingdom on earth, and here live with His family forever. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22
 2. The Bible reveals that increasingly difficult times will precede Jesus' second coming. Jesus Himself said there will be tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. And, He described troubling and terrifying events which will occur before He returns. Matt 24:4-8; Luke 21:25-26
 - a. Jesus exhorted His followers that, when these things begin to happen, we should be elated in joyous expectation because we know that the plan of redemption is about to be completed. Luke 21:28
 1. The circumstances that will culminate in the trouble and tribulation of the final years of this age won't come out of nowhere. They're setting up now.
 2. We are going to be increasingly affected by the developing chaos. We must know how to view these circumstances in terms of the end result—the completion of God's plan of redemption.
 - b. We are taking time to talk about what is going to happen and why. This understanding will help us navigate through the months and years ahead and give us peace, hope, and joy in the midst of the increasing hardships coming to this world.
- B. Matt 24:1-3—Shortly before Jesus left this world and returned to Heaven, His apostles asked Him what signs will indicate His return is near. He gave a lengthy answer and a number of signs that will precede His return.
1. The first sign Jesus mentioned was massive religious deception, specifically false Christs and false prophets who proclaim false gospels. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24-25
 - a. To appreciate the significance of this sign, we need to know that when Adam sinned, Satan became the god of this world. An unseen, counterfeit kingdom now operates in the earth in opposition to God, and influences unredeemed men and women. Luke 4:6; II Cor 4:4; Eph 2:1-3; Eph 6:12; etc.
 - b. Prior to the second coming, Satan will offer the world a counterfeit Christ in an attempt to hold on to his counterfeit kingdom—a false messiah, an anti or in place of Christ who will deceive many.
 1. Through this man Satan will entice the world to submit to and worship him in an attempt to hold onto his kingdom and prevent the rightful King from returning. Rev 19:19
 2. This man will preside over a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion. The actions of this man and the responses of the people of the world to him will produce much of the chaos of the final years of this age. Rev 13
 - c. The rise of this man won't be like a science fiction movie, nor will it be freaky or bizarre. It will be the natural next step in the flow or present trajectory of world events.
 1. Over the past several decades the idea that we all are part of a global community that must

come together to solve global problems (climate change, inflation, terrorism, food and fuel shortages, inequity, pandemics, etc.) has become infused in the thinking of much of the world.

2. When you take the religious element out of the words savior and messiah, you can see how turning power over to this man will see reasonable and necessary. A savior is someone who saves from danger or destruction. A messiah is a professed or accepted leader of some hope or cause (*Webster's Dictionary*). In many ways, the world is already looking for a global leader.
2. Last week I pointed out that we are currently witnessing the development and growth of a false and potentially global religion that will welcome this ultimate false Christ, the final world ruler—one that has the capacity to draw in people from many faith backgrounds, including Christianity.
 - a. This false religion seems like a new form of Christianity. It refers to Jesus, but not as He is revealed in Scripture. It credits Him as a good teacher and moral example. But doesn't insist that you believe He is God or He rose from the dead.
 1. It quotes passages from the Bible, but they are out of context. It denies basic teachings of the Christian faith, but seems more inclusive, loving, and non-judgmental than Christianity.
 2. It claims that it doesn't matter what you believe or how you live as long as you're sincere and trying to be a good person—there are many paths to God. And, it's really all about love.
 - b. The New Testament has numerous warnings about the religious deception prior to Jesus' return—warnings not only from Jesus, but from eyewitnesses who saw Jesus die and saw Him alive again.
 1. Paul wrote: Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons (I Tim 4:1, NLT).
 2. Peter wrote that in the last days there will be scoffers “who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing that they desire”, mocking Jesus’ promise to return (II Pet 3:3-4, NLT). False teachers will deny the Lord who bought them through His shed blood (II Pet 2:1).
 3. Jude wrote that people will use God’s grace, which is an expression of His love, as an excuse for immorality: “They will pervert the grace (the spiritual blessing and favor) of our God into lawlessness and wantonness and immorality” (Jude 4, Amp).
 - c. This is why it's so important to read the Bible for yourself—especially the New Testament which was written by eyewitnesses who walked and talked with Jesus—so that you know the real Jesus and can recognize false Christs and false gospels.
 1. That's why we spent the first few months of this year talking about who Jesus is and why He came to earth, according to the Bible. That's why I wrote my latest book (*You Can Stand The Storm; How The Bible Makes You Rock Solid*)—to help you learn to read the Bible effectively.
 2. In the context of the increasing chaos and deception in the years leading up to Jesus’ return, Paul told Timothy, his son in the faith, to continue in the Scriptures. II Tim 3:13-14
 3. People sometimes ask me why I believe that Jesus’ return is near. It's because the Bible has a lot to say about world conditions when Jesus returns—a number of which have not been possible until recently.
 - a. Technology for the predicted worldwide system of government, economy, and religion has only existed for a few decades. The worldwide web facilitates and will continue to facilitate the spread of new religious ideas to a global community.
 - b. The Bible predicts a huge departure from the Christian faith just before Jesus returns (II Thess 2:3), and traditionally Christian countries are rejecting the faith in unprecedented numbers.
 1. Pew Research (a major polling source) just reported that America is experiencing a surge of adults leaving Christianity to become atheistic or agnostic or nothing in particular.
 2. Christians are primed for religious deception. Not only is Bible reading at an all time low, so is belief in its reliability. Gallup (a major polling source) reports that 58% of people who profess Christianity and believe that God inspired the Bible also believe you can't take it literally.

- C. Let's go back to Jesus' teaching where He listed signs that will indicate His return is close at hand. Notice that Jesus connects the religious deception that will occur prior to His return to an increase in lawlessness.
1. Matt 24:11-13—And many false prophets shall rise up and lead many astray. And because of the multiplication of lawlessness, the love of many shall grow cold. But he who has persevered to the end shall be preserved from destruction (Wuest).
 - a. The Greek word translated lawlessness (iniquity in some translations) means without law. It is used to mean lawlessness or wickedness. The implication is a violation of Divine Law.
 1. The ultimate source of Law is Almighty God, the Creator. The term law is used almost 200 times in Scripture to mean the revealed will of God with respect to human conduct (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*). Lawlessness is ultimately a rejection of the Law Giver.
 2. This is God's world and we are His creatures. Humanity has a moral obligation to obey their Creator: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person (Eccl. 12:13, NLT). All humans have failed in this obligation and that's why redemption is necessary.
 - b. The final world ruler is called the man of lawlessness (II Thess 2:3, same Greek word Jesus used). This man will have a complete disregard for God's law: And he spoke terrible words of blasphemy against God, slandering His name and all who live in heaven, who are his temple (Rev 13:6, NLT).
 2. To appreciate what will happen before Jesus returns, and what has already begun to happen, we need to make a few comments about the course of world since Jesus was here two thousand years ago.
 - a. Jesus came to earth the first time to begin the process of reclaiming the world He created, and His first coming had a tremendous impact on the world.
 - b. Since AD 33 Christianity has grown from a handful of followers to a world religion. It has influenced the development of western civilization, which in turn impacted the entire world. Even people who don't believe in God or Jesus have been impacted in some way through Jesus' first coming and the spread of Christianity. (There are many good books that describe His impact.)
 1. Secular Roman society was infused with Judeo-Christian values and morality. The elevation of women and children, the establishment of orphanages, hospitals, charitable and relief groups—all trace to Christians who obeyed Jesus' command to love God and love their fellow man.
 2. Schools, colleges, and universities were established on the foundation of Judeo-Christian values and morality. Concepts of law and justice, art, music, and literature were all influenced by and infused with these values as Christianity spread.
 3. Western civilization, which was founded on Judeo-Christian ethics and morality, produced the industrial revolution which led to technological developments that have changed the world.
 3. God's Law (expressed through Judeo-Christian values) has been the foundation of society in the western world for two millennia. But that is rapidly changing as the West rejects God's Law.
 - a. Over the last four or five decades (since the counterculture revolution of the sixties) the West has increasingly abandoned and even demonized Judeo-Christian values, ethics, and morality and, in many cases, openly defies Almighty God.
 1. The idea that there is an ultimate or absolute reality or Truth has largely been discarded. Feelings have superseded facts: That's your truth. This is my truth. I'm living my truth.
 2. The effect of this failure to adhere to and uphold the two millennia old agreed upon standard in society (Judeo-Christian ethics) is producing increasing confusion and chaos (or lawlessness) throughout our country and much of the western world.
 - b. This shouldn't surprise us since God's Word (the Bible) says that this is what happens when men abandon their Creator. It leads to increasingly debased behavior which eventually results in a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28). A reprobate mind is unable to make decisions in its own best interests.
 1. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans in AD 57. Although there was a community of believers

in Rome, Paul had never visited them, but wanted to do so. He sent them this epistle to lay the groundwork for a visit he was planning to make in the not too distant future.

2. This epistle is the most comprehensive presentation of the gospel Paul that preached. After his initial greeting (Rom 1:1-15), Paul began his presentation by explaining why the news of Jesus' death and resurrection is the power of God to save all who are guilty of sin (Rom 1:16-17).

c. As Paul presented his teaching, he lined out what happens when men reject the knowledge of God. He described the downward spiral of behavior that results in a reprobate mind. Rom 1:18-32

1. Paul noted how God deals with those who willfully reject Him. He gives them over to the consequences or effects of their behavior. Rom 1:24; 26; 28

2. Men and women truly have free will. And God's response is: I force no one to serve Me. If you don't want Me, you can have what you want—along with the end result of your choice.

4. In the months and years to come we are going to continue to see increasing lawlessness expressed in many ways and feel the effects of reprobate decisions made by people in authority over us and around us.

a. The behavior and decisions of people who have rejected the truth of God the Creator and believed a lie (been deceived) will create the chaos of earth's final years in its present form.

b. II Tim 3:1-5—Paul described the behavior of people before Jesus' return. Note they will proclaim that they are godly but deny the power that could make them godly—the transforming power of the Holy Spirit received through repentance and faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

c. However, none of this is bigger than God. He uses the hardships of life in a fallen world produced by reprobate decisions and causes them to serve His ultimate purpose, which is to have a family of holy, righteous sons and daughters in a renewed and restored world.

1. God will use the chaos created by this final mass rejection of Him at the end of this age and cause it to serve this purpose. The calamity of the final years of human history in this age will wake some people up to the Truth revealed in Jesus, and they will cry out to God for mercy.

2. The Bible makes it clear that Almighty God will take a great, final harvest out of the generation that experiences the tribulation of the last years in this present age. Rev 7:9-15

D. Conclusion: We haven't said all that we need to say, but consider these points as we close. We must recognize the times. The end of this age is at hand and there are unavoidable challenges ahead of us.

1. It is going to be increasingly difficult to live in this world. We must learn to keep our priorities and our perspective right. This life in its present state is not the end. We are only passing through this world as it is. The most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus.

2. II Pet 2:6-9—in the context of the lawlessness and wickedness that will precede the Lord's return, Peter reminded his readers about a man named Lot, Abraham's nephew. He was living in the city of Sodom when it experienced destruction for its ungodliness (lessons for another time). Note two points.

a. One, Lot was a righteous man who was vexed (bothered, troubled) by the unrighteous behavior of the people around him. Two, God delivered Lot out of the destruction that came on the city.

b. It's okay to be troubled by what we see around us. The Bible doesn't tell us how Lot responded to what he saw and how he felt. But we do know how Habakkuk the prophet responded as he watched circumstances develop that led to the destruction of his nation and the altering of life as he knew it.

Habakkuk, like Lot, saw and experienced the effects of lawlessness—abandoning God's Law.

1. Hab 3:17-19—Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains (NLT).

2. We need to look past what we see in the moment and acknowledge and praise God for His wonderful plan of redemption. He'll get us through until He gets us out of whatever is ahead!