

## DELIVERED FROM WRATH

- A. Introduction: Jesus Christ is coming back to this world in the not too distant future. We are taking time to talk about why He is returning and what His second coming will mean for humanity.
1. Jesus said that in the years immediately preceding His return, there will be tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. Matt 24:21
    - a. The circumstances that will produce the coming chaos and calamity are setting up now. As a result, we will face increasingly challenging developments and events as the months and years go by.
    - b. The Bible gives us a lot of information about world conditions prior to the Lord's return. It also provides information that will help us navigate through the coming difficulties.
      1. Jesus told His followers that when you see these unsettling circumstances beginning to unfold, be elated in joyous expectation because your redemption (deliverance) draws near. Luke 21:28
      2. As the world grows darker and darker, you can only be excited if you know the end result of the second coming—and if you know that you will make it through whatever is ahead.
    - c. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters, and He made the world to be a home for Himself and His family. Because of sin, all humans are disqualified from the family. Because of sin, the earth is infused with a curse of corruption and death. Eph 1:4-5; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross and make it possible for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. He'll come again to restore the earth by removing every trace of sin, corruption, and death. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22
      2. The end result of the second coming is the completion of God's plan for a family with whom He can live forever in a home with no more sorrow, pain, loss, suffering or death—this world.
    - d. The second coming of Jesus is a broad term for a number of events that occur over a period of time before God's plan is completed. The Bible doesn't give a lot of specific detail about many events.
      1. People tend to focus on individual events and speculate about what may or may not happen, how those events will unfold, and they lose sight of the big picture.
      2. When we know the end result, it gives us hope and peace in the midst of chaos and trouble. Therefore, our focus in these lessons is the big picture—God's overall plan for humanity.
- A. To help us see the big picture, we're considering what the second coming meant to the first Christians, people who interacted with Jesus and were looking forward to His return.
- B. Their view of the second coming was not affected by all the speculation about the Lord's return that has developed through the centuries since He returned to Heaven.
2. For the past two weeks we have been talking about the fact that wrath and judgments are associated with the second coming of Jesus, and have more to say tonight.
    - a. The word wrath is used as a figure of speech in the Bible to mean the penalty for breaking God's Law. Although God is not pleased with sin, wrath is not His emotional response to mankind's sin.
    - b. Wrath is His just and right response. The just and right penalty for sin is death or eternal separation from God, both in this life and in the life to come. John 3:36; II Thess 1:7-9
    - c. About AD 95 Jesus appeared to His apostle John and showed him the final catastrophic events on earth just prior the second coming. John recorded what he saw in the Book of Revelation.
      1. John saw a final world ruler—a Satan inspired and empowered man commonly known as the Antichrist—draw the world into a nuclear, chemical, and biological holocaust (WW III) that results in tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. II Thess 2:3-4; 9-10; Rev 6:1-17
      2. These events are referred to as the wrath of the Lamb, not because Jesus makes them happen, but because God wants it clearly understood that the calamity earth experiences in this unique period of human history, is a direct consequence of their rejection of Him for a false Christ.
- B. Last week we looked at what Paul taught about the second coming. Paul was an eyewitness of Jesus, and

personally instructed by the Lord (Acts 9:1-6; Gal 1:11-12). We get a lot of information about what Paul taught Christians from two letters (epistles) he wrote to believers in the Greek city of Thessalonica.

1. Paul established this community of believers in AD 51, but was only there a few weeks when severe persecution broke out and he was forced to leave the city.
  - a. Paul wrote to encourage the new believers and to clarify some things he taught while he was with them. Paul told them that believers are delivered from the wrath to come. I Thess 1:9-10
    1. First and foremost, Paul meant that believers are justified (declared not guilty and brought into right relationship with God) through the blood of Christ when they accept Jesus and His sacrifice at the Cross. Therefore, they will never experience wrath or separation from God.
    2. But he also taught them that believers are delivered from the wrath associated with the Day of the Lord. This wrath will come on those who are in darkness (unbelievers) like a thief in the night (suddenly and unexpectedly) and bring destruction. I Thess 5:3-5
    3. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess 5:9, NIV). The clear implication is that Paul taught that believers (children of light) will escape wrath associated with the Day of the Lord.
  - b. Paul was a Jew and a Pharisee, and thoroughly schooled in the Old Testament prophets. Half of the prophets, whose books are found in the Old Testament, wrote about the coming Day of the Lord. Joel 1:15; Isa 13:6; Obadiah 15; Amos 5:8; 20; Zeph 1:7; 14; Ezek 30:3; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5
    1. The Day of the Lord referred to a time of wrath and judgment that will precede the Lord’s arrival to set up His kingdom and restore the earth. In that period of time God will deal with the ungodly, deliver His people from all harm, and then live among them forever.
    2. The prophets wrote that the Lord will administer justice as part of His plan to restore the world to pre-sin conditions and establish His kingdom on earth. Jude 14-15; Acts 3:21
2. Based on what these prophets wrote, first century Jews (who made up most of Jesus’ earliest followers) expected to make it through any tribulation (trouble, chaos) connected with the coming Day of the Lord.
  - a. Peter (one of Jesus’ twelve apostles) gave his first public sermon fifty days after Jesus returned to Heaven, on the day that the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues.
  - b. Peter explained to a crowd gathered in Jerusalem that they were witnessing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was predicted by the Old Testament prophet Joel. Acts 2:16-18; Joel 2:28-29
    1. Note the rest of the prophecy—Joel described the same catastrophic events connected with the Day of the Lord that Jesus said will precede His coming. Peter also quoted this part of the prophecy. Joel 2:30-31; Luke 21:25-27; Acts 2:19-20
    2. But notice how Joel’s prophecy ends: Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered. Jesus and Peter both said almost the same thing when they referred to the catastrophic events at the end of this age. Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Luke 21:28
    3. Before Jesus came to earth the first time, Joel’s prophecies, along with similar statements by other prophets, assured first century Jews (and eventually the Gentiles who became believers) that God’s people will survive the tribulation that will precede the coming of the Lord.
      - A. Matt 24:1-3—A few days before Jesus was crucified He told His apostles that the Temple was going to be destroyed. However, they were not upset by His prediction. They simply asked Jesus when this will happen and what signs will indicate His return is at hand.
      - B. They knew from the prophets (like Joel) that tribulation will precede the Day of the Lord. But they also knew that God’s people will be delivered. So, they were not afraid.
3. We must remember that the Bible is progressive revelation. God has gradually revealed His plan of redemption through the pages of Scripture until the full revelation given in and through Jesus.
  - a. The Old Testament prophets did not clearly see that there would be two comings of the Messiah (Jesus), separated by two thousand years. Nor did they see that He would come first as a Suffering

Servant and then a conquering King. Isa 53; Ps 24

- b. Shortly before Jesus went to the Cross, He began to prepare His men for the fact that He was going to leave them without establishing the visible kingdom of God on earth right then. Matt 24:3
    1. At Jesus' final Passover meal with His apostles the night before He was crucified (the Last Supper), much of what He said to them was meant to comfort them because He was leaving.
    2. Among other things, Jesus revealed that He was going back to His Father's house (Heaven) to prepare a place for them, and "When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am" (John 14:3, NLT).
  - c. After Jesus was crucified and resurrected, He was able to take His apostles back through the Old Testament Scriptures and show them how He fulfilled various prophecies (Luke 24:27; 44-46). And, He began to give them more details about His second coming.
4. Paul was given quite a bit of new information about the Lord's return. The Lord revealed to Paul that believers will be taken off the earth before the Day of the Lord begins.
- a. We pointed out last week that just before Paul told the Thessalonians, in the context of the Day of the Lord, that believers are not destined for wrath, he reminded them that when the Lord returns, all who belong to Jesus will be caught up to meet Him in the air and go back Heaven. I Thess 4:13-18
    1. The Greek word translated caught up (*harpazo*) means to snatch or catch away. When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin (long after these people died) the Greek word *harpazo* was translated into the Latin word *raptus*. That's where we get the word rapture.
    2. These people weren't focused on "the rapture!". The word rapture as we use it didn't exist at that point. They were focused on Jesus' promise to come and gather believers to Himself.
  - b. Remember, Paul said that the Lord told him about this event (I Thess 4:15). This is information from Jesus about how believers will escape the wrath connected with the Day of the Lord (or the second coming of Jesus)—I will gather you to Myself.
    1. Note Paul's words immediately following his statement about escaping wrath in the Day of the Lord: He (Jesus) died for us so that we can live with Him forever, whether we are dead or alive at the time of his return. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing (I Thess 5:10-11, NLT).
    2. It wasn't about whether the rapture is pre, mid, or post tribulation. It was about Jesus coming to get them. This isn't escapism. It's part of the plan. Jesus died to bring us to God so that where He is we will be also—both in Heaven and when He returns to earth. I Pet 3:18
5. The Lord revealed several such mysteries to Paul. (A mystery is a previously unrevealed aspect of God's plan.) Jesus revealed to Paul that there is coming a generation of believers who will not see physical death—those believers who are alive on earth when His second coming begins.
- a. I Cor 15:51-52—Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable (made incorruptible and immortal), and we shall be changed (ESV).
  - b. Paul clearly connected this event—the transformation of the bodies all believers, those who are alive and those who are dead—to the catching away he described in I Thess 4:13-18
  - c. Christians today get caught up with the timing of the last trumpet to try to prove or disprove the timing of the rapture in relation to the tribulation—and they miss the big picture. Jesus is coming back to deliver His people from the day of wrath as He completes His plan of redemption.
    1. A lot of trumpets are mentioned in connection with the second coming (lessons for another day). The blowing of trumpets was familiar to first century Israel where they were blown for many reasons—to announce the Year of Jubilee, to get the attention of people, to declare war, as a demonstration of joy. Nothing in Paul's letters indicates he did any detailed teaching on

trumpets. It's not about the trumpet. His point is: Jesus will gather us to Himself.

2. Notice that Paul wrote: We shall all be changed. All who? In context, he clearly means all believers in Jesus—from the most spiritual to the most carnal. Paul actually wrote this letter to a church that was filled with some very carnal people (lessons for another day). I Cor 3:1-3

6. A few months after Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, he received word that someone was telling these new believers that Day of the Lord had already begun. These false teachers may have said that the persecution they were experiencing was the wrath connected with the Day of the Lord.

a. These new believers at Thessalonica were upset about it because, based on what Paul taught them, they thought they would be gone (off the earth) when the Day of the Lord takes place. Paul wrote them a second epistle to clarify the misunderstanding.

1. II Thess 2:1-2—When our Lord Jesus returns, we will be gathered up to meet him. So I ask you, my friends, not to be easily upset or disturbed by people who claim that the Lord (the Day of the Lord) has already come. They may say that they heard this directly from the Holy Spirit, or from someone else, or even that they read it in one of our letters. Don't be fooled (CEV).

2. Note, Paul began his reassurance by reminding them that we will be gathered up (caught up) to meet Jesus in the air. Paul then reminded the Thessalonians that certain identifiable events will precede the Day of the Lord—events which had not yet taken place

A. II Thess 2:3-5—For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion (*apostasee*) against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction. He will exalt himself and defy every god there is...claiming that he himself is God. Don't you remember that I told you this when I was with you (NLT).

B. We know from other epistles Paul wrote that in the last time (the days before Jesus returns) some will depart from the faith (rebel) and listen to seducing spirits and doctrines of devil (I Tim 4:1). Jesus also said that prior to His return false Christs and false prophets will come on the scene and deceive many (Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24).

3. Paul reminded them that this final ruler “can be revealed only when his time comes. For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it steps back” (II Thess 2:6-7, NLT). Then he will come on the scene (lessons for another day).

C. Conclusion: We have more to say in upcoming lessons, but consider these thoughts as we close. The second coming of Jesus is not an isolated event revealed in a freaky book called Revelation. It is the culmination of God's plan to have a family and live with them on earth forever.

1. When the apostles were first proclaiming the good news of Jesus' death, resurrection, and soon return, no one knew yet that Jesus would be gone for two thousand years.

2. They expected the Day of the Lord to occur and the man of lawlessness to come on the scene during their lifetime. But they lived with expectancy, not fear, because they knew that the Lord would get them through whatever was ahead and bring them to Himself. Note two statements Paul made to them.

a. I Thess 3:13—May he (the Lord) strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones (NIV).

b. I Thess 5:23-24—May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it (NIV).

3. We don't yet have all the details about every event connected with Jesus return. People have a tendency to speculate about what we don't yet know. Don't get caught up in little unclear pieces of the puzzle.

4. See the big picture, the overall plan—Jesus is coming back to complete the plan of redemption. As the world grows darker, our future is bright. That's where the hope and peace is found. More next week!