

## SEPARATING WHEAT FROM TARES

- A. Introduction: We're working on a series about the second coming of Jesus. We're considering what the second coming meant to the first Christians, the eyewitnesses who walked and talked with Jesus and heard His promise to return. Acts 1:9-11
1. This world is growing darker and more dangerous, just as the Bible predicts. And we need the hope that comes from knowing that Jesus will return. We need the encouragement that comes from understanding why He's coming back and what it will mean for humanity.
    - a. The second coming is a broad term that covers a number of events which occur over a period time leading up to the Lord's return. People tend to focus on individual events—many of which are not clearly explained in Scripture—and they miss the big picture or God's overall plan for humanity.
    - b. We are focusing on the fact that Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for a family. At His return Jesus will establish the visible kingdom of God on earth and live here forever with His family.
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross, and open the way for sinful men and women to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God. John 1:12-13
      2. He will come again to cleanse the earth of all corruption and death, restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family, and establish His kingdom on earth. Acts 3:21; Rev 21-22
  2. The first Christians lived with the awareness that Jesus is coming back and eagerly anticipated His return. They knew that He is coming back to bring full salvation.
    - a. Full salvation includes renewing the earth and resurrecting bodies so that all of God's family can live on earth again. Full salvation means no more sorrow, pain, loss, or death.
    - b. Heb 9:26-28—He (Jesus) came once for all time, at the end of the age to remove the power of sin forever by his sacrificial death (NLT)...He will appear a second time, not carrying any burden of sin, not to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who are (eagerly, constantly and patiently) waiting for and expecting Him (Amp).
  3. For the past few weeks we've been talking about the Book of Revelation. In AD 95 Jesus appeared to His apostle John and showed him the completion of God's plan of salvation—the renewed earth and God on earth with His family of redeemed sons and daughters. Rev 21-22.
    - a. John recorded what he witnessed in the Book of Revelation and then sent it to seven churches in Asia Minor (present-day western Turkey). John was an overseer for these churches.
      1. In the book John also described a series of increasingly catastrophic events on earth leading up to the Lord's return. John used the word wrath twelve times and judgment fifteen times.
      2. The events John wrote about result in great loss of life and much destruction to the earth itself. Jesus called this period tribulation unlike anything the world has ever seen. Matt 24:21
    - b. Many have the mistaken idea that Revelation depicts an angry, wrathful God who has finally had enough and decides to punish the world. Is what John saw? Is that how the first Christians would have understood the events recorded in the Book of Revelation? That's our topic tonight.
- B. Last week we discussed the fact that the earth will not be destroyed when Jesus returns. It will be renewed and restored (Isa 65:17; II Pet 3:10-12; John 21:1). Part of restoring the earth involves removing everything and everyone from God's creation that does not belong to Him. That process includes wrath and judgment.
1. The Greek word that is translated judge or judgment (*krino*) means to separate, to distinguish between good and evil—to choose out the good, and so to judge or render a decision.
    - a. Note what Jesus told His apostles when He was on earth. He talked about a man who separated weeds (sons of the devil) from wheat (sons of the kingdom) at harvest time. Matt 13:24-29; 36-43
      1. Jesus then explained: So it will be at the end of the world (the original Greek reads: at the completion of this age). I, the Son of Man, will send my angels, and they will remove from my

Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil... Then the godly will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom (Matt 13:40-43, NLT).

2. Removing the wicked was not a new concept for the first Christians, many of whom were Jewish—including the first apostles and the men who wrote most of the New Testament.

A. These people were familiar with the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Numerous Old Testament passages refer to the removal of the wicked (those who don't belong to God) from the earth, and the righteous (those who belong to Him) possessing earth forever.

B. Let all sinners vanish from the face of the earth (Ps 104:35, NLT); The wicked will be removed from the land (Prov 2:22, NLT); The godly will inherit the land and live there forever (Ps 37:29, NLT); The meek [in the end] shall inherit the earth (Ps 37:11, Amp).

b. In Rev 14:14-20 John described a harvest that removes the wicked. He wrote that he saw Jesus holding a sickle and an angel with a sickle. The angel was told to cast the ripe harvest into the wine press of God's wrath. This was good news to people familiar with the Old Testament prophets.

1. Isa 63:1-6—Isaiah wrote about the Lord coming to announce Israel's salvation from their enemies in garments stained red, as if He has been treading out grapes. The Lord stated that He had trodden down (removed) Israel's enemies because the time had come to deliver Israel.

2. Joel 3:12-16—Joel wrote about a harvest in the day of the Lord (their name for what we now call the second coming). The prophets wrote that in the day of the Lord He will come to deal with the ungodly, deliver His people from all harm, and live with them on earth forever.

A. Joel wrote that at that time the nations will gather in the valley of decision (literally, threshing). Joel called it the valley of Jehoshaphat (v12), a reference to an actual place where God defeated (removed) a united force that came against His people. II Chron 20

B. The New Testament connects this event with the second coming (Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12).

Note, Joel wrote that at that time the Lord will be a refuge and fortress for His people (v16).

2. This imagery was not frightening to the first Christians because they knew from the prophets, and from what Jesus told them, that He will ultimately remove from His creation all that is not of Him so that those who belong to Him can live in peace and safety. And that's a good thing.

a. There will be a period of judgment and wrath connected with Jesus' return, and it will affect every human being going back to Adam and Eve.

1. In Revelation John recorded that he saw an angel flying in the sky shouting: Fear God...give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge (Rev 14:7, NLT).

2. John also heard people in Heaven shout: The nations were angry with you (God) but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants...you will destroy all who have caused destruction on earth (Rev 11:18, NLT).

3. Destroy and destruction are the same Greek word. It means to corrupt utterly and to ruin—The time has come to destroy those who corrupt the earth (Rev 11:18, TPT)

b. We aren't going to do an in depth study of judgment and wrath, but consider several points, and remember what we've said in previous lessons. Wrath is God's right and just response to sin. The just and righteous penalty for sin is death or eternal separation from God who is life

1. Jesus took our place at the Cross and was punished for us as us. The wrath that should have come to us when to Him. If you have accepted Jesus and His sacrifice, then there is no more wrath (punishment) for your sin. If you reject Jesus, then the wrath of God (eternal separation from Him) awaits you when you leave this earth. Isa 53:4-6; I Thess 1:9-10; John 3:36

A. At this final judgment, the Lord will deal with all who throughout human history rejected His offer of salvation from sin through the revelation of Jesus given to their generation.

B. They will stand before the Judge, the books will be opened, and it will be shown why it is right and just to forever separate them from Himself and His family. Rev 20:11-15

2. Those who throughout human history have believed on the Lord will be rewarded with a return to the new earth to live with the Lord forever in the home He created for His family. Rev 21:3

- C. Possibly you are thinking: But doesn't the Bible say that God is going to punish the world? Yes it does, but the early Christians were not frightened by that statement either. Let's examine the passage. Isa 13:9-11
1. First we need to establish context. When the Lord brought His people into Canaan (present-day Israel) around 1400 BC, He warned Israel that if they abandoned Him to worship the idols of the nations around them, He would allow their enemies to overrun them and remove them from the land.
    - a. Through the centuries Israel struggled with idol worship and all its related immorality. God sent numerous prophets to His people to call them to repentance and warn them of coming destruction at the hands of their enemies if they did not turn back to Him.
    - b. Isaiah was sent to the southern part of the nation (known as Judah) when the northern part (known as Israel) was about to be overrun by the Assyrian Empire. Isaiah's message to the south was repent or you will be conquered by the Babylonian Empire and removed from your land.
  2. In Isaiah chapter 13, the prophet began by stating that the Babylonian Empire would eventually be overthrown (v1-5). This happened in 539 BC when the Persians conquered Babylon.
    - a. v9-11—Then Isaiah's short term prophecy flowed into long term prophecy when he referred to the day of the Lord (v6). According to Isaiah, the day of the Lord will be cruel, with wrath and fierce anger. God will desolate (ruin) the land, destroy sinners out of it, and punish the world for its evil.
      1. v9—The Hebrew word translated cruel means terrible or causing terror or awe. The idea is not that God is mean and awful, but that He is awe-inspiring and deserves reverence.
      2. Wrath means an outburst of passion. Anger literally means nose or nostril and is often paired with the word fierce for emphasis. The point is that God is sorely displeased by sin.
      3. Many prophets used these terms (cruel, fierce anger) to convey God's hatred of sin and to help people see that not only is sin deadly to humanity, it is unacceptable to Almighty God.
    - b. There is a dual reference in Isa 13:9-11. Israel and Judah will be punished with forced removal from their land, first by Assyria (in 722 BC) and then Babylon (in 586 BC) for repeated unrepentant idol worship: v9—(the Lord) will make the land a desolation and sweep the sinners away from it (ABPS); root out the sinners from it (Jerusalem Bible).
      1. But this is also a reference to what will happen at the second coming when the sun, moon, and stars are darkened—removal of all those (dead and alive) who don't belong to God.
      2. The Lord will punish the world (Isa 13:11). World refers to more than the people on earth when the sun and moon go dark. It refers to all humanity going back to Adam and Eve.
        - A. The Hebrew word translated punish means to visit and to search out. It refers to someone paying attention to a person, either to do them good or to bring punishment. Rev 11:18
        - B. When Jesus returns, all who belong to Him (back to Adam) will be rewarded with forever life on earth, and all who are not His will be forever separated from God and His family.
  3. Paul the apostle (a former Pharisee schooled in the Old Testament who was personally taught the message He preached by Jesus) clearly stated the punishment Jesus that will administer when He returns.
    - a. II Thess 1:8-9—Those who don't know God (and) refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus ...will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord (NLT). Note that the punishment for sin isn't catastrophic events on earth—that's not enough to pay for sin.
    - b. All who throughout human history have rejected the revelation of salvation through Jesus given to their generation will be punished with everlasting destruction or eternal separation from God.
      1. The Greek word translated destruction means to destroy or ruin. There is a destruction that is greater or worse than physical death—eternal (or forever) separation from God who is life.
      2. John 3:16—Jesus died so that whosoever believes on Him will not perish, but have eternal

life. Perish and destruction both come from the same root Greek word. The idea is not extinction, but ruin or loss. There is no greater ruin than to be lost to your created purpose—sonship and forever life with God and His family on this earth once it is renewed and restored.

c. There are two ways to bring an end to sin on this earth—forever banish sinners from the planet or transform them into sons and daughters, who have the desire and power to live holy lives with their Father on earth forever (Matt 13:43). That's what salvation is all about.

1. In one of John's other New Testament writings he wrote that all who are sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ will face this final judgment (of separation) with confidence.
2. I John 4:17—And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we are like Christ here in this world (NLT). We're like Jesus in the sense that we are sons, born of God through faith in Him.

D. Conclusion: The second coming will affect everyone who has ever lived—not just those living on the earth at that time. However, those who are one earth just prior to the Lord's return will experience tribulation like no other group in history—not because God is mad, but because of the time in which they were born.

1. We made the point in previous lessons that the destruction in these final years will come from the actions of a final world ruler (commonly known as Antichrist) and the responses of the people on earth to him. There will be a complete rejection of the God of the Bible as humanity embraces this final false Christ.

a. When people willfully reject their Creator, God gives them over to it. In the context of God's wrath against sin, the apostle Paul described a downward spiral that begins with willful rejection of God.

1. This leads to increasingly debased behavior and ultimately produces a reprobate mind—a mind that is unable to make decisions in its own best interest. Rom 1:18-32

2. God connects the destruction on earth to Himself in the Book of Revelation so that people will understand that the chaos and suffering on earth is the result of their rejection of Him. That's why the events described in Revelation are referred to as the wrath of the Lamb. Rev 6:15-17

b. The symbolism used in Revelation to describe much of the tribulation in the final years of this age is consistent with the effects of a nuclear, chemical, and biological war generated by wicked men.

2. The circumstances that will produce this final catastrophic period in human history are setting up now and will increasingly affect our lives. Hard times are ahead for this world.

a. As people increasingly abandon their Creator and reject Judeo-Christian ethics and morality, it will continue to result in deterioration in behavior and increased social chaos and unrest (lawlessness).

More and more reprobate decisions will be made that directly affect our lives.

1. The night that Jesus was arrested He said this to the men who arrested Him: This is your hour and the power of darkness (Luke 22:53). Based on what happened over the next three days it looked as though Satan and his minions had won. They destroyed God's anointed.

2. Or so they thought. The Lord saw a way to use this wicked hour and bring tremendous good to to multitudes—salvation from sin to whosoever believes on Jesus and His sacrifice.

b. For a time, it looked as though Jesus' first coming ended in defeat. And, leading up to His second coming, it will look as if the forces of evil have triumphed. But, thanks to the information in God's Word (the Bible) we can look past the chaos and wickedness to the end result. Righteousness and truth will triumph when Jesus returns and completes God's plan for a family.

3. On top the worsening world conditions we face, we don't need the unnecessary fear that comes from misunderstanding what God is doing and will do. That's why we're taking time to study these issues.

a. God will do what He has always done. He will get His people through until He gets us out. He will use the increasing chaos in society and cause it to serve His ultimate purpose for His family.

b. Remember Jesus' words: When you see these things begin to happen, be elated in joyous expectation for your redemption draws near. God's plan will be completed. Luke 21:28