

## PEOPLE AT THE END

- A. Introduction: When Jesus left this world and returned to Heaven forty days after His death and resurrection, His first message to His followers was: I'll be back. Acts 1:9-11
1. The second coming of Jesus is not a side issue. It is an integral part of the gospel, the good news of salvation from sin through Jesus. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for humanity, His plan to have a family of sons and daughters with whom He can live forever on this earth. Eph 1:4-5
    - a. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin. His sacrificial death opened the way for sinners to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. John 1:12-13
    - b. He will come again to cleanse the earth of every trace of sin, corruption, and death and restore it to a fit forever home for Almighty God and His family. Rev 21-22
  2. Just a few days before Jesus was crucified, in response to questions from some of His followers, He gave a number of signs that will indicate His return is near. Matt 24:4-31; Mark 13:5-27; Luke 21:8-28
    - a. Jesus said that prior to His return there will be great tribulation on the earth, unlike anything the world has ever or will ever experience: There will be great tribulation—affliction, distress, and oppression—such as has not been from the beginning of the world (Matt 24:21, Amp).
    - b. But He told His followers that when you see these things begin to happen: Stand straight and look up, for your salvation is near (Luke 21:28, NLT). The original Greek language carries the idea: Be elated in joyous expectation because your redemption (deliverance, salvation) is near.
      1. You can only be elated in the face of the troubles and tribulation coming on this world if you see the big picture and understand the end result.
      2. In the next three lessons we're going to pull together the information we've covered these last several months, tie up some loose ends, and consider how we can and should live in the light of the fact that Jesus may return within our lifetimes.
- B. This world in its present condition is not as God created or intended it to be because of sin. But it will not stay the way it is. Paul the apostle wrote: This world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV).
1. Remember what is wrong with the world. Both this planet and the human race are infused with corruption and death. When the first man (Adam) disobeyed God, a fundamental change took place in the entire creation. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 8:20
    - a. As the head of the human race and earth's first steward, Adam's actions affected the race resident in him as well as the earth—When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so that everything began to grow old and die (Rom 5:12, TLB).
      1. God never intended for this world to be filled with poverty, disease, crime, wars, natural disasters, killer storms, death, pain, or loss. All of those things are present because of sin.
    2. Not only was the planet affected, human nature was corrupted. Human beings are born with a sin nature, a fallen nature that is expressed through acts of disobedience. Rom 5:19; Rom 3:23
      - a. And because of Adam's sin, a counterfeit kingdom was set up in the world. This kingdom is presided over by Satan, a created being who led an angelic rebellion against God. When Satan enticed Adam to join him by disobeying the Lord, the rebellion spread to earth. Luke 4:6; II Cor 4:4
        1. Jesus defeated Satan at the Cross by rising from the death (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 rebellion against God.
        2. All who have not received salvation from sin through faith in Christ are in Satan's kingdom and under his power. John, one of Jesus' first followers, wrote: The world around us is under the power and control of the evil one (I John 5:19, NLT).
  2. Jesus is coming back to reclaim this world, restore it to pre-sin conditions, bring the kingdom of God to

earth, and then live with His family forever.

- a. Just at Satan opposed Jesus' first coming, Satan will attempt to stop His second coming. Prior to Jesus' return, the devil will offer the world a counterfeit Christ, his Anti (in place of) Christ.

Through this man Satan will entice the world to worship him and reject Jesus, the rightful King.

1. This Satan inspired and empowered man will preside over a global system of government, economy, and religion. His actions and the response of the people of the world to him will produce the tribulation in the years leading up to Jesus' return. Rev 13; II Thess 2:9-10

This wicked man will draw the world to a nuclear, biological, and chemical holocaust (WW III) that will bring great suffering and loss of life to this planet. Rev 6:1-17

- b. The conditions that will be in place when the Lord returns will not come out of a vacuum. They are setting up now. And, in the months and years, ahead we will have to deal with increasing challenges because of these developments.

C. In the years leading up to Jesus' return, not only will Satan cause chaos through this wicked final ruler, the wickedness in human hearts will be demonstrated as never before.

1. We like to think of ourselves (and people in general) as basically good people. But that is contrary to what Jesus taught. He said that there is none good (in character or constitution) but God. Matt 19:17

a. Paul, in the context of reminding Christians about the love that God has shown to us through the Cross of Christ, gives us important information about the human condition apart from God.

1. Eph 2:2-3—You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger just like everyone else (NLT).

2. Humanity's fallen condition requires supernatural transformation by the power of God. When a person believes in Jesus as Savior and Lord he becomes a new creature—the old (previous moral and spiritual condition) has passed away (II Cor 5:17, Amp). (Lessons for another day)

b. II Tim 3:1—Paul wrote that in the last days (the period leading up to the Lord's return) perilous times will come because of people's behavior. Then he went on to describe their behavior.

1. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self control; they will be cruel and have no interest in what is good (II Tim 3:2-3, NLT).
2. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed with pride, and love pleasure more than God. They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly (II Tim 3:4-5, NLT).

2. Maybe you're thinking that there have always been people who act like what Paul described. You're correct. Corrupted human nature showed up immediately in the children born to Adam and Eve after they sinned. Their first born son, Cain, murdered the second born and lied to God about it. Gen 4:1-9

a. However, there are more of us on earth now than ever before (almost 8 billion of us). More people means more fallenness and more wicked behavior. And, because of technology, we can spread our wickedness farther and do a lot more damage than we could just a few decades ago.

b. Not only are our numbers greater than ever, there's been a relaxing of restraint on human behavior as Judeo-Christian ethics and morality have been undermined, particularly in the western world.

1. Over the last 2,000 years the world has been influenced and shaped by Judeo-Christian ethics and morals. Basic societal institutions have been shaped for the good by this influence—government, economics, education, art, science, medicine, charitable giving, civil liberties, work ethic, respect for human life, elevation of women, etc. (lessons for another day).

2. In recent years there has been a massive rejection of Judeo-Christian morals and ethics in the western world, and a corresponding increase in moral corruption and cultural decline.
  - A. Since the counterculture revolution of the 1960's, societal restraints on human behavior have been increasingly removed. We are experiencing the effects of fallen people under the influence of the wicked one, with less and less outward restraint.
  - B. Western culture has become increasingly secularized and amoral. Church attendance, Bible reading, and belief in God as Creator and Lord has progressively declined.
    1. In Rom 1:18-32 Paul describes a downward spiral of increasingly debased behavior that takes place when human beings reject God as their Creator and moral compass.
    2. Sin has a corrosive effect on the mind—it deceives and hardens the one who persists in it (Heb 3:13). The end result is a reprobate mind (Rom 1:28). A reprobate mind is a mind that is unable to make decisions in its own best interest.
  - c. Without societal restraints and without the restraint of fear of God (awe, respect, and reverence for Him), the wickedness in human hearts is being expressed in unprecedented ways through reprobate decisions, and immoral, chaotic, and unlawful activity. Paul wrote that religious deception inspired by evil spirits will add to the chaos in these final years.
    1. I Tim 4:1-2—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. These teachers are hypocrites and liars. They pretend to be religious, but their consciences are dead (NLT).
    2. II Tim 4:3-4—For the time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths (NLT).
3. Due to the behavior of wicked, unrestrained people all around us, our lives will become more and more challenging. We must learn how to navigate through it. Consider these thoughts.
  - a. Many of us feel the pressure that we've got to do something to stop all this. But the root problem is spiritual and can't be fixed with natural solutions. Taking back the government won't fix what ails our country or this world. No politician, government program, or legislation can change hearts.
    1. I'm not telling you not to vote or work for temporary relief. But realize that the world the way it is, is going to come to an end because it's not the way God created it or intended it to be.
  2. The most important thing is not who wins an election or drawing people to your political view point. The most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus so that they become part of God's family and have a future on the renewed earth, in the life after this life.
  3. This world in its present condition will come to an end. God is working out His plan to recover what was lost when Adam took the world into the pigpen of sin corruption and death. There is an end in sight—and that's a good thing. Jesus' first followers lived with that awareness.
    - A. Peter wrote: The end of all things is at hand (I Pet 4:7, KJV). End, in the Greek, means a completion; to set out for a definite point or goal.
    - B. John wrote: This world is fading away, along with everything it craves...the last hour is here (I John 2:17-18, NLT). World refers to the system that is in opposition to God.
  - b. If your hope is in this world in its fallen condition, not only are you headed for great disappointment, you'll be too emotionally stirred up by the increasing wickedness to follow God's leadings as He tries to guide you through the difficult months and years ahead. Consider I Kings 17:1-16.
    1. About 900 years before Jesus came into this world, Israel experienced severe famine because of reprobate decisions made by its leadership. God directed Elijah the prophet on how to make it through the difficulties. And, Elijah was able to help a widow and her son through the famine.
    2. It wasn't easy for either of them, but both got through by following God's Word. (Note that

Elijah was a proven prophet of God—not like the myriads of people on the internet today.)

- c. In the context of worsening human behavior prior to the second coming, Paul urged Timothy, his son in the faith, to continue in the Scriptures which reveal the salvation in Jesus. II Tim 3:13-15
- D. The final years leading up to the Lord's return will be unlike any other period in human history because the wickedness of Satan and the wickedness in the human heart will be on display as never before.
1. Although God is not behind the horror of these final years, He will cause it to serve His purposes. God's purposes are always redemption—to save as many people as possible.
    - a. There will be more supernatural signs of the reality of God given during this period of tribulation than ever before in the history of man. Consider one example.
      1. Rev 11:3-12—Two prophets with supernatural powers will oppose the final world ruler (Antichrist) in Jerusalem for 3 ½ years. They will have power to stop rain from falling and no one will be able to harm them. This will be a dramatic testimony of God's power.
      2. When these two have completed their testimony, the wicked ruler (Antichrist) will kill them and leave their bodies in the street in the middle of the city. For 3 ½ days the world will watch and celebrate that these men of God are dead.
        - A. Then suddenly, in front of the entire world, God will raise them to life and take them into Heaven. At that point a great earthquake will destroy a tenth of the city, killing thousands.
        - B. Note the result: Many people wake up to the reality of God: And everyone who did not die was terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven (Rev 11:13, NLT).
      - b. These various power demonstrations will result in a great harvest of people. Multitudes will be saved from sin by acknowledging Jesus as Savior and Lord. Although many will lose their lives due to persecution, when Jesus returns, they will come with him from Heaven, be reunited with their bodies raised from the dead, and then live forever on the restored earth. Rev 7:9-14
    2. Although the Bible indicates that believers in Jesus will be removed from the earth prior to the worst events of these years (I Thess 4:13-18), we'll have to endure increasingly challenging circumstances as conditions set up for a world that completely rejects its Creator and Lord and embraces Antichrist.
      - a. We will be increasingly affected and troubled by what we see going on around us. Peter wrote that before righteous Lot was removed from Sodom, he was vexed by the wickedness he saw all around him. II Pet 2:7-9
      - b. Don't be surprised when fallen people act like what they are. It's okay to be appalled by the behavior of wicked men and women. But never forget that Jesus died for them as well as for us—and some of them will believe before it's too late. II Pet 3:9—(God) does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent (NLT).
- E. Conclusion: We aren't here to fix up the world. It can't be fixed because the root problem is spiritual, not physical. It will take the transforming power of God to root out the sin, corruption, and death.
1. The Bible ends with a description of the final result of Jesus' return: There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and all its evils are gone forever (Rev 21:4, NLT).
    - a. We are here to shine the light of Jesus in our corner of the world so that people can come to saving knowledge of Him and be transformed into sons and daughters of God.
    - b. Our message is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (not fix the world). Our enemy is the devil (not people). Our fight is the fight of faith (the fight to hold on to the truth of God's Word no matter what we see or feel).
  2. When you understand why Jesus is coming back and what it will mean for humanity, you can be elated in joyous expectation—even in the face of increasing unrighteousness, chaos and tribulation. Much more next week!!