

THE COMING APOCALYPSE

- A. Introduction: For several months we've been discussing the second coming of Jesus, and we're reaching the end of our series. We have a few more points to make, as we consider how we can and should live, in light of the fact that Jesus may return within our lifetime.
1. Our approach to this topic has been a little unorthodox. Rather than focusing on individual events and people associated with the second coming, our focus has been on the end result—Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for humanity.
 - a. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Him, and He created this earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 - b. Neither humanity nor this planet is as God created them to be. Both have been damaged by sin. Men and women are disqualified from God's family because of sin, and the physical world is infused with corruption and death. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:20
 1. Jesus came to earth the first time to reclaim His family. Through His sacrificial death on the Cross, He opened the way for sinners to be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. John 1:12-13
 2. Jesus will return to reclaim the family home. He will cleanse the earth of all sin, corruption, and death, restore it to pre-sin conditions, and then live here with His family forever. Rev 21-22
 2. Jesus' return is near, and the Bible informs us that the years leading up to His second coming will be increasingly chaotic and difficult. The Bible describes a global system of government, economy, and religion that will be in place when Jesus returns. Rev 13
 - a. This system will be presided over by a man, inspired and empowered by Satan, who is commonly known as Antichrist—a false Christ or Savior. Through this man, Satan will attempt to stop the return of the rightful ruler of this planet—the Lord Jesus Christ. II Thess 2:8-10; Rev 19:19
 1. The actions of this final wicked ruler, and the responses of the people of the world to him, will produce tribulation that, according to Jesus, will be unlike anything the world has ever seen or will ever see—a nuclear, chemical, and biological holocaust (WW III). Matt 24:21; Rev 6:1-17
 2. The circumstances that will produce this global system, along with people that will eagerly embrace a false Christ, won't come out of a vacuum. Those circumstances are setting up now and will increasingly affect our lives in negative ways.
 - b. Jesus said that when we see these things begin to happen, we should be elated in joyous expectation because we know that our redemption (salvation, deliverance) is near. Luke 21:28
 1. In order to be elated in joyous expectation, we need to look past the circumstances to the end result—Jesus is coming back to restore this world to what God always intended it to be.
 2. In this series, we've emphasized how the first Christians viewed Jesus' return. Even though they knew about the coming turmoil, they eagerly anticipated Jesus' return. They weren't afraid because they knew that His people will be delivered. We have more to say tonight.
- B. The word apocalypse is a familiar term. In our culture, it is used to refer to a coming cataclysmic event that will destroy the world. An apocalypse actually is coming, but it won't result in the destruction of the world.
1. We get the English word apocalypse from a Greek word—*apokalupsis*. This Greek word means to reveal, unveil, or bring to light. This word is used in the title of the Book of Revelation (*apokalupsis*).
 - a. Note how Revelation begins: [This is] the revelation (*apokalupsis*) of Jesus Christ—His unveiling of the divine mysteries (Rev 1:1, Amp). Revelation is an unveiling of God's plan and purpose. Revelation reveals (unveils) Jesus and His completion of God's plan for a family on this earth.
 - b. The Book of Revelation is not about the devil, the Antichrist, the mark of the Beast, 666, or the end of the world. It's about Jesus reclaiming the family home Himself and His family.

2. Remember what we've already said about the Book of Revelation. Like every other New Testament book, it was written by a real person (John the apostle) to real people (seven churches in Asia Minor over which he had oversight), to communicate important information (God will complete His plan).
 - a. Jesus gave the information to John while the apostle was exiled on an island off the coast of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), about AD 95.
 1. When Jesus appeared to John, more than sixty years had passed since the Lord left this world, and He had not yet returned. Imagine how the recipients of the book felt when they heard the news that the Lord had recently appeared to John with a message for them from Jesus Himself.
 2. Revelation was an encouragement to the first readers because it showed the end of the story. The book assured them that the Lord had not forgotten them, and that His plan for His family and this world will be completed.
 - b. The Book of Revelation describes a series of increasingly catastrophic events that cause great suffering and loss of life on the earth, just prior to the Lord's return.
 1. The events described are connected to Jesus, not because He makes them happen, but because God wants it clearly understood that the calamity earth experiences in this unique period, is a direct consequence of their rejection of Him for a false Christ.
 2. We pointed out last week that although God is not behind the horror of these final years, He will cause it to serve His redemptive purpose—to save as many people as possible. In addition to the horror, there will be more supernatural signs of the reality of God given during this period than ever before in the history of man—and many will believe on Jesus. Rev 11:13; Rev 7:9-14
 - c. The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, a literary style that was popular from 200 BC to AD 140. Apocalyptic literature often describes a definitive battle between good and evil and uses symbols to convey the message. John used at least 300 symbols in his book, most of which are defined either in Revelation or somewhere in the Old Testament.
 1. We have a general idea of the events that will take place in the years leading up to Jesus' return. But the specifics—the identity of the Antichrist, the mark of the Beast, how the action begins, the nations directly involved—are not clear. No one knows the meaning of every verse yet.
 2. People have a tendency to focus on individual events and people, speculate about them, and miss the big picture. This is the big picture: Jesus is coming back to reclaim this world, vanquish His enemies, and complete God's plan of redemption.
3. Remember that the first Christians heard the Book of Revelation in terms of what they knew from the Old Testament prophets, and from what Jesus and His apostles told them.
 - a. They knew that there will be a time of wrath and judgment connected with Jesus' return (Rev 6:16-17; Rev 14:7), but they weren't afraid because they understood it in terms of their own history.
 1. Judgment and wrath, to them, meant that God will deliver them from bondage by judging their enemies. The first time the Bible refers to the wrath of God, it is in reference to what the Lord did to Egypt when He delivered (redeemed) Israel from Egyptian slavery. Ex 15:7
 2. They also knew that righteous Noah was delivered from judgment during a worldwide flood, safe in an ark (boat) that God directed him to build. And they knew that righteous Lot was removed from Sodom before destruction came on the city for its wickedness. Gen 6-8; Gen 19
 - b. They knew that Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied that the Lord will one day come with thousands of His saints to carry out judgment on the ungodly. Gen 5:22-24
 1. The Greek word translated judgment (Jude 14-15) implies administering justice. Justice means doing what is right. Jesus is coming to do what is right and to make things right.
 2. It is right to reward good and punish evil. Those who belong to Jesus will be rewarded with forever life on this earth, once it is renewed and restored. All those who have rejected Him as Creator, Savior, and Lord will be forever separated from Him and His family. Rev 11:18

- c. The first Christians knew what Jesus said to His apostles the night before He was crucified: He was going back to Heaven (His Father’s house) 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).
1. They knew what Paul preached. (Remember, Jesus Himself taught Paul the message he proclaimed, Gal 1:11-12). Part of Paul’s message, given in the context of Jesus’ second coming, was: Christians have been delivered from the wrath to come. I Thess 5:9
 2. Paul also taught that believers that are alive at the time of the second coming will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and go back to Heaven with Him. I Thess 4:13-18
 - A. The Greek word translated caught up (*harpazo*) means to snatch or catch away. When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, the Greek word *harpazo* was translated into the Latin word *raptus*. That’s where we get the word rapture.
 - B. The first Christians weren’t focused on “the rapture”. That word as we use it didn’t exist yet. They were focused on Jesus’ promise to come and gather believers to Himself.
 4. We’ve made the second coming and the Book of Revelation about the Antichrist, the new world order, and the mark of the Beast. But Revelation is an unveiling of Jesus and the culmination of God’s plan of redemption—His plan for humanity and this world.
 - a. Remember, the second coming of Jesus will affect every human being who has ever lived because, when Jesus returns, resurrection of the dead will take place. All who are currently in either Heaven or Hell will be reunited with their body raised from the grave.
 - b. Those who belong to the Lord will return to this earth, once it is renewed and restored, to live here forever. Those who don’t belong to Him will be forever consigned to eternal separation from the new earth, in a place referred to in the Book of Revelation as the second death and the lake of fire.
- C. The Book of Revelation opens and closes with Jesus, because it’s all about Jesus. We don’t have time to explain everything in the opening, middle, or closing, but I want you to see Jesus as the first Christians saw Him in Revelation—Savior, triumphant Lord, Almighty God who has redeemed and delivered His people.
1. Jesus appeared to John, told him to write down what he saw, and send the scroll (book) to seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev 1:11). Notice what John said about Jesus in his introduction, before the apostle began to describe the vision he was given.
 - a. Rev 1:5—I received this message from Jesus, the faithful (trustworthy) witness to these things. In other words, this is the truth and you can trust it. Remember, the first readers knew that when Jesus was on earth, He declared that He is the truth (John 14:6) and that He came “to bring truth to the world. All who love the truth will recognize that what I say is true” (John 18:37, NLT).
 - b. Rev 1:5—John reminded his readers that Jesus is the first to come out of death through resurrection. Because He lives, so will we. He is the prince or ruler of the kings of the earth, the Rightful King who is coming to reclaim the kingdoms of the world, just as the prophets predicted (Isa 9:6).
 1. Rev 1:6—Jesus loved us and cleansed us of sin with His own blood. He made us a kingdom of priests before God. Give to Him everlasting glory! He rules forever and ever! Amen (NLT).
 2. Rev 1:7—John cited two Old Testament prophets (Dan 7:13; Zech 12:10) and reminded his readers that Jesus will come on the clouds, as promised. All will see Him, even those who rejected Him, and will mourn (lament) because He will remove those who are not His.
 - c. Then John quoted Jesus: I am the Alpha and Omega. This was a familiar cultural expression, and had great meaning. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.
 1. The Jews used the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph* and *tau*) to express the whole of the matter, from beginning to end. Jesus was proclaiming: I have all knowledge and am the sum of all truth. But there is more to what He said.
 2. The prophet Isaiah quoted Almighty God as saying: I am the first and the last—the before all

and the end of all (Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). Jesus took this I am name for Himself, expressing the fact that He is the author and cause of all things (Creator) and the end (completion) of all things. I am from eternity to eternity. I am God Almighty.

2. In the vision that followed, John saw Jesus come out of Heaven with His armies, vanquish His enemies (the final wicked world ruler and his forces) and take control of the kingdoms of this world. Then John witnessed the Lord bring the capital of Heaven to a renewed and restored earth to live with His people.
 - a. Rev 19:11-13—Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. And the one sitting on the horse was named Faithful and True. For he judges fairly and then goes to war...and his title was the Word of God (NLT).
 - b. Rev 19:19-20—Then I saw the beast (John’s symbol for Antichrist) gathering the kings of the earth and their armies in order to fight against the one sitting on the horse and his army. And the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who did mighty miracles on behalf of the beast...both the beast and his false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire (NLT).
 - c. Rev 10:6-7—God will wait no longer...when the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled. It will happen just as he announced it to his servants, the prophets (NLT).
 - d. Rev 11:15—Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: The whole world has now become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever (NLT).
 - e. Rev 21:1-4—Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...and...the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven...I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, ‘Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people...there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever’ (NLT).
3. John ended his book with more quotes from Jesus: I come quickly and my reward is with me.
 - a. Jesus will reward all those, who throughout human history, have believed on Him with everlasting life on this earth once it is renewed and restored. All who have rejected God’s offer of salvation will be forever separated from the Lord and His family. Rev 22:12-13; Rev 22:20; Rev 11:18
 - b. The Book of Revelation begins and ends with the statement that the things recorded in the book will happen shortly and quickly. Rev 1:1; Rev 22:6; Rev 22:7; 22:12; 22:20.
 1. People sometimes use these statements to try to make the case that the Bible can’t be trusted since it has been two thousand years since these words were written—and Jesus isn’t back yet.
 2. A form of the same Greek word is used in each instance. The word does not mean quickly or shortly from the writer’s point of view. It means that once the events described in the book began to happen, they will happen quickly.

- D. Conclusion: An apocalypse is coming—the revelation (revealing) of Jesus Christ and the completion of God’s plan for a family. And that’s a good thing for all who belong to Him. Consider one more passage.
1. Israel’s great king David wrote this psalm about the Lord over three thousand years ago. Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. In His humanity, He is descended from David. In His deity, Jesus is David’s Savior and Lord. The second coming will affect David, just as it will you and me.
 - a. Ps 24:1; 7-8—The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof...Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle (ESV).
 - b. Ps 24:9-10—Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory (ESV). 2.
- Jesus is the King of glory, the Lord Almighty, and He is coming back to reclaim what is rightfully His—this earth. That’s what the coming apocalypse is all about. Come Lord Jesus come! More next week!