

THE SEASON OF JESUS' RETURN

- A. Introduction: Acts 1:9-11—Jesus' first promise to His followers when He left this world was, I'll be back. We've spent several months discussing the second coming of Jesus Christ. In this series, we have focused on the big picture—why Jesus is coming back and what His return will mean for humanity.
1. This world in its present condition is not the way it's supposed to be. Because of mankind's sin (going back to Adam) humanity and the earth are filled with corruption and death (Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12). But it won't stay this way forever. I Cor 7:31—This world in its present form is passing away (NIV).
 - a. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan for a family. Through His death on the Cross, Jesus made it possible for sinners to be transformed into sons and daughters through faith in Him.
 - b. When Jesus returns, He will cleanse this world of sin, corruption, and death and restore it to pre-sin conditions, so that God's family of redeemed sons and daughters can live here forever. Rev 21:1-4
 2. The Bible gives us much information about world conditions at the time of Jesus' second coming. This information makes it possible for us to say that we are now in the season of the Lord's return. In this final lesson of our series, we're going to consider what the Bible says about the timing of Jesus' return.
- B. Matt 24:1-3—A few days before Jesus was crucified, He told His apostles that the Temple in Jerusalem was going to be completely destroyed.
1. His men were not shocked by His statement because they knew from the Old Testament prophets that before the Lord restores the world, there will be a period of tribulation and destruction. But they also knew that God will deliver His people. Dan 12:1-2; Isa 26:20-21; Jer 30:7; Joel 2:28-32; etc.
 - a. The men asked for signs that will indicate His return is near: Tell us...what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end—that is the completion, the consummation—of the age (Matt 24: 3, Amp).
 - b. We live in the age when things aren't the way that they are supposed to be because of sin. The Greek word translated end does not mean termination. It means the bringing together of various parts of a plan to an appointed climax.
 - c. We are coming to the end of God's plan of redemption. Since the first man sinned, Almighty God has been progressively revealing and working out His plan to bring this age to an end and restore His family and the family home through Jesus.
 2. Matt 24:4-31—Jesus answered their question by giving a number of signs. He then exhorted His apostles that, although you may not know the day and the hour that I'll be back, based on these signs, you should be able to recognize the season of My return.
 - a. Matt 24:32-33—Jesus reminded them that when you see a fig tree or any other tree bud and begin to put out leaves, you know that summer is near (Luke 21:29). In the same way, when you see the events I've described begin to happen, you will know that My return is near.
 - b. Matt 24:34-35—This generation (or age) won't pass until all these things be fulfilled. In other words, this age won't end until these things happen, and the generation that sees the beginning of the process will see it all. Remember, once these events begin, they'll happen quickly. Rev 22:7
 1. Matt 24:42-51—As part of His answer, Jesus exhorted them to be watchful and prepared for His return. Jesus wants every generation to live with the awareness that He is coming back. This reality affects our priorities and perspective and gives us hope in the midst of a dark world.
 2. To be prepared doesn't mean store up food, buy gold, or go live in the woods. It means realize that this life is temporary, and eternal things matter most. We're only passing through this world as it is, and the best is yet to come. We'll be back to earth once it is restored.
 3. Matt 24:4-8—Note that Jesus compared some of the signs that will bring this age to a close to the pains of childbirth: This is how the birth pains of the new age will begin (v8, TPT).
 - a. Use of the analogy of birth pains gives us insight into how the signs of Jesus' return will unfold.

Birth pains come at intervals, start out light, and are somewhat far apart.

1. However, they increase in intensity and frequency, and get closer together, as the time of the birth nears and hard labor begins. In most cases, the labor lasts longer than the actual birth.
2. Although the process is not pleasant, knowledge of the end result helps women get through it. And, no one tries to stop this process once it begins. They prepare themselves to go through it.
- b. Jesus talked about wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes. How can these be signs since all these events have been happening since time began?
 1. Each of these signs is an expression of life in a fallen, sin damaged world—natural disasters, disease, death, conflict between men. But, remember the birth pain analogy. According to Jesus they will get more intense and more frequent as we enter the season of the Lord's return.
 2. That's the natural progression of a fallen world. There are more people on earth than ever (almost 8 billion). More people means more wicked behavior. Technological developments have made it possible to express our wickedness on a larger and more destructive scale.
4. Jesus called wars a sign. Consider an example of how the combination of more people and developing technology has made warfare more disastrous and deadly than ever before in the history of man.
 - a. Until the 20th century, wars were localized. WWI (1914-1918) changed that. Over 30 nations were involved and 65 million troops from around the world were mobilized to fight.
 1. Technological developments (including airplanes, submarines, improved repeating weapons, and the use of chemical weapons) made WWI the deadliest war in history up to that point. There were an estimated 37 million military and civilian deaths.
 2. And, this first ever massive movement of troops around the world led to the first pandemic (the Spanish flu of 1918-1919). An estimated 50 million people died from the disease worldwide.
 - b. WWII (1939-1945) surpassed WWI in every way, with even more troop movements and an estimated 50-70 million military and civilian deaths. And, the war produced significant changes that are consistent with what the Bible predicts about world conditions when Jesus returns.
 1. With the creation of nuclear weapons, mass destruction on a scale previously unimaginable is now possible. In His answer to His apostles, Jesus said that unless the tribulation prior to His return is stopped (by His return) the entire human race will be destroyed. Matt 24:21
 2. The Bible reports that there will be a world system of government, economy, and religion in place when Jesus returns, with the capacity to limit who buys and sells worldwide. Rev 13:1-18
 - A. At the end of WWII, the United Nations was established as an international peace keeping organization, a major step in planting the idea of worldwide cooperation in peoples' minds.
 - B. Since then, technological advances have linked the world in ways not possible before. With these advances has come a move toward globalism and the idea that, by working together as a global community, we can solve the world's problems.
 - C. The Bible makes many references to Israel and Jesus' return. But shortly after Jesus went back to Heaven, Rome destroyed Israel (AD 70). As a result of events connected with both world wars, Israel came back on the world stage as an independent nation in 1948. 5. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24—In His answer, Jesus said that the first sign that will signal His return is near is religious deception and the rise of false christs. He said that as a result, sin (lawlessness) will abound, and the love of many will grow cold (v12). Lawlessness, at its root, is a rejection of God and His laws.
 - a. Once again, there has always been lawlessness in the world. And false Christs have come on the scene over the last two millennia. But in recent decades there has been a major increase in both.
 1. In previous lessons we discussed the fact that there has been a progressive removal of restraint on fallen human behavior, particularly since the counterculture revolution of the 1960's. Behaviors that were once considered sinful are now widespread and even celebrated.
 2. We also noted that sin has a corrosive effect on humans. As God's standards are abandoned, it

leads to a downward spiral of increasingly debased behavior. The end result is a reprobate mind (a mind that is unable to make decisions in its own best interests). More and more, we see people make decisions that are harmful to themselves—but they can't see it. Rom 1:18-32

3. We pointed out that a false form of Christianity is rapidly developing. This new religion denies basic Bible doctrines and states that there are many paths to God. Behavior doesn't matter as long as you are sincere and living your truth. God is inclusive and it's all about love.

b. These developments are a powerful indication that we are in the season of the Lord's return, because they pave the way for two identifiable events that the Bible says will precede the Lord's return.

1. The apostle Paul wrote that there will be a massive departure from faith in the Lord Jesus, and that a final world ruler will come on the scene and declare that he is God. II Thess 2:3-4

2. This man will be the ultimate false Christ. This new false religion will welcome him. His actions, and the responses of people, will lead to the worst war in history (WWIII). Rev 6:1-17

C. Some say we aren't in the season of Jesus' return because He can't come back until the gospel is preached to the whole world. Others say He's not coming back any time soon because the church is not yet glorious.

1. The idea that Jesus won't return until the gospel is preached to the whole world is based on a statement the Lord made when He answered the apostles' question about the signs of His coming.

a. Jesus had just listed a number of signs that will indicate His return is near (Matt 24:4-12). Then He said: He who endures to the end (stays faithful to Me no matter what happens) will be saved (have eternal life with Me on earth), and the gospel will be preached to the world. Matt 24:13-14

b. We noted in a previous lesson that Paul taught that the church will be taken off the earth before the final false Christ takes control (II Thess 2:1-8; I Thess 4:13-18). Once the church leaves there won't be a single believer in Jesus on earth—there will be a huge harvest field of unsaved people.

1. During that time the gospel will be preached to all. Once this final ruler comes to power there will be only a few years left before Jesus returns to cleanse the earth and set up His kingdom.

2. In these last few years, there will be more supernatural signs of the reality of God given to the world than ever before in the history of man. For example, three angels will fly through the skies proclaiming the gospel and warning of impending judgment. Rev 14:6-9

Jesus made this statement, He wasn't giving the conditions of His return. He was assuring His men that, despite the turmoil of these final years, the gospel will be preached to the world.

c. When His

2. What about the idea that Jesus won't come back until the church is glorious? The Bible doesn't say that.

a. The emphasis in the New Testament is on Jesus presenting believers to Himself and the Father as glorious (blameless, spotless) because of what **He has done for us** through His death on the Cross.

1. Paul wrote that Jesus died "to present (the church) to himself as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish" (Eph 5:27, NLT), and "to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith" (Col 1:22, ESV).

2. When we read the context of these two passages, we find that they have nothing to do with the second coming. The point is that Jesus died to cleanse the church and make it holy.

b. Remember, the church is not just those believers who are on earth when Jesus returns. It's all who have put faith in Christ through the centuries. When Jesus comes to take believers off the earth (the rapture), He'll have one part of the church with Him to meet another part of the church. I Thess 4:14

c. Becoming God's son or daughter through faith in Christ starts a process that will ultimately conform us to the image of Christ—or make us like Jesus in every part of our being. Rom 8:29-30

1. However, this process won't be fully completed until the second coming, when our bodies are glorified, or made incorruptible and immortal made like Jesus' resurrected body. Phil 3:20-21

A. Even those members of the church who are now in Heaven aren't fully glorified yet because they're separated from their bodies. Full glorification will take place when

Jesus returns, when our bodies are resurrected.

B. I John 3:2—Yes, dear friends, we are already God’s children, and we can’t even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is (NLT).

2. If spiritual maturity is a condition of Jesus’ return, then He’s never coming back because the church on earth at any one time is constantly changing. There are always new believers being added who are nowhere near maturity in Christ, as well as older Christians who are still carnal.

D. Conclusion: There’s a lot of confusion among Christians as to how we should respond to the birth pains—the increased godlessness, wickedness, lawlessness, and injustice in society.

1. Some say that Christians need to rise up and use our spiritual authority to bring an end to this increasing chaos. Others say we need to humble ourselves and fast and pray. Then God will heal our land.
 - a. There have been times in the past when it was appropriate for Christians to use their authority and fast and pray to change society for the good, because it wasn’t time for the plan to be consummated.
 - b. But if it’s time for the end of this age (and signs increasingly point that direction), then we can’t stop it or pray it away. Since it seems that we’re in the season of the Lord’s return, how should we pray?
 1. Lord, raise up laborers and send them into your harvest field. Help people see you as you truly are and see themselves as they truly are in relation to you. Matt 9:36-38
 2. Give us wisdom to navigate through these difficult times in a godly way. Thank you for protection and provision. Thank you that you will get us through until you get us out. I Pet 1:5
2. Because we live in America, and because it was founded on Judeo-Christian principles and morality, it’s easy to get God’s purposes mixed up with America’s destiny—God has to and will save our country.
 - a. Jesus didn’t die to preserve America. He died to save human beings from every nation, tribe, and tongue. He’s coming back to restore the entire earth for all of His family, back to Adam and Eve.
 - b. The United States must decline because we have been the biggest roadblock to globalism. Our current problems may ebb and flow (like birth pains). But ultimately, the nation will subscribe to a world government and fully abandon Judeo-Christian ethics and morality.
 1. We have produced several generations of youths who believe that America is the worst country in the world. They believe that democracy and capitalism are oppressive, and inherently racist systems, and that Christianity is a repressive, bigoted, outdated religion.
 2. This is a hard fact to accept. But don’t let it discourage you. Recognize the season that we’re in, and realize what is most important—that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus.
3. Just as Jesus came at the right time the first time, He will come at the right time this time. There is every reason to believe that we are in the season of His return.
 - a. As the birth pains increase in frequency and intensity, our lives will increasingly be affected in negative ways. We must learn to look at these developments in terms of the big picture. The fact that God’s plan is about to be completed is our source of hope, peace, and joy.
 - b. In the context of the transformation that will occur when Jesus returns, Paul wrote: All creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Rom 8:22, NLT).
 1. The psalmist wrote that the earth will rejoice when the Lord comes: Let the earth rejoice! Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise...Let the trees of the forest rustle with praise before the Lord! For the Lord is coming...Let the earth and all living things join in. Let the rivers clap their hands in glee...for the Lord is coming (Ps 96:11-13; Ps 97:7-9, NLT).
 2. As the birth pains increase in frequency and intensity, we need to do the same. Remember what Jesus said when He answered His apostle’s question about signs of His return: When you see these things begin to happen, be elated in joyous expectation because your redemption (the completion of the plan) is drawing near (Luke 21:28). Come Lord Jesus, come!