

# What Happens Next?

*What Does the Bible Teach?*

By Don Green

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## **Truth Community Fellowship**

Creation Museum

2800 Bullittsburg Church Road

Petersburg, KY 41080

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

We're here this morning to survey what the Bible says about the future. And let me just set a little bit of context in terms of what brought us to this point over the past few months, recognizing that we have a few visitors here this morning. This is the finale of about a three month series that we've been doing where we've been surveying what we teach as a church. We're a new body of believers; we've been at this a little over two years. So what we wanted to do was, we wanted to lay down a foundation so that people would know what it is that we believe, what you can expect by way of doctrine to come from this pulpit and if you think about it, it's a little bit like what we've done over the past three months is we've taken a piece of property and we have built a fence around it and today we're going to complete the circle of that fence. Inside that fence is what we believe the Bible teaches is true; it's what we affirm as believers; it's what we hold forth in the faith and the truths that we would die for, frankly. We went from, Why do we believe the Bible? To, Who is God? and What is the Trinity? Who is Satan? Who is man? What is sin? What is salvation? What is the church? Why does the church exist? What happens when we die? Those are the last ten messages that we have looked at in just trying to do a very quick and a very broad sweep of survey of biblical doctrine so that it would be clear what this church believes and what we stand for and what you can expect from our teaching. And inside the fence there is the realm of what we believe; outside the fence are those that have other thoughts that, you know, they can do what they want but we are establishing our boundaries of what we believe and that's very crucial in the life of a church. It means that when somebody comes and if someone would come and bring a contrary teaching to that, that they would have to go back out; they would have to stay outside of the fence because this fence is our realm of protection. It is where truth is found, truth both of the Bible and the truth of Truth Community Church.

So fences, as you know, fences are there to protect and that's what we've tried to do over these past three months or so. To change the metaphor, we've laid a foundation over these past three months and our intention, God willing, over the next three decades of what I trust will be my pulpit ministry here, our intention is to build on that foundation going forward. This is a great day to reach the conclusion of such an important series and today we get to consider what the Bible says about the future. If you're a note taker, here's three words, I want to give you three words to write down at the start. There are three words that I want to impress upon your forehead, as it were, to be the lens through which you

see everything here today. It's the grid through which I would want you to understand everything about what is about to come. Three words: hope, glory, and victory. Hope, glory, and victory. That is what the Bible teaches us to expect as believers in Jesus Christ. That is the goal toward which all of human history is moving. Human history is not primarily about the nations as we know them and as we think about them with the political machinations and the wars and rumors of war that take place. Behind the scenes, behind the curtain of all that the news talks about is the mighty hand of God orchestrating the events of human history in detail and in broad scope to accomplish exactly what he decreed before the foundation of the world. We are living in the midst of the outworking of the providence of God which will accomplish his purposes without fail. That's what the future holds and for those of us that belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, for those of us that have turned from sin and embraced him as Lord and Savior, Lord and Master, we are on the winning side of the eternal purposes of God and the outcome for us is glory, it is hope, it is victory. That's what lies ahead for us.

Now, with that said, I want to shift the introduction and the preparation here for just a moment to help you understand the spirit in which we're going to teach these things on eschatology not only today but in the future. What the Bible says about the future, the sheer volume of material that Scripture has about prophetic matters is massive. It is massive. One source, one expert who surveyed the entire Bible and documented all of his work says this, that 27% of the Bible involves predictive matter of one kind or another. 27% Some of those prophecies having been made thousands of years ago have since been fulfilled before today, you know, the prophecies of the first advent of Christ have been fulfilled in his birth, in his death, in his resurrection, but 27% of the Bible involves predictive matter. Let me give you numbers, a few of you like statistics. The count is this: 8,352 verses out of the total of 31,124 verses in the Bible involve predictive matter of one kind or another, involve some manner of God saying, "This is what is going to happen in the future." 8,352 verses. The sheer volume of that content is enormous. Needless to say, I'm not going through 8,352 verses here this morning. We need to realize the magnitude of the subject that we are approaching here this morning. We're going to deal with the future in one message as we've done throughout this entire series.

S. Lewis Johnson, who is perhaps the most accomplished theologian and biblical scholar that most Christians have never heard of, S. Lewis Johnson said this in a message similar to what we're about to hear this morning. He said and I quote, "It is necessary for us to have a great deal of humility when we seek to interpret the many details of the prophetic word." Continuing the quote, he said, "We are studying a very difficult subject in which we are trying to put together a number of passages from the word of God. To put it together into one coherent whole is a very difficult task." Charles Spurgeon spoke with similar humility when he said and I quote, "I am no prophet nor the son of a prophet, neither do I profess to be able to explain all the prophecies of this blessed book. I believe that many of them will only be explained as the events occur which they foretell."

Now, that perspective I found resonating in my own heart as I've been working in preparation for this message for a number of weeks now. There is such a vast volume of material, there is such a level of complexity to it, there is such differences of opinion on

the matter among men who are much smarter and more accomplished than me. I want to say this: that does not mean that we cannot find the truth of what Scripture says; we're going to try to articulate what we understand Scripture to teach here this morning. But it means that as a church, what our intention is going to be as we speak about matters of prophecy, is that we want to do it with a spirit of humility that recognizes that better men than us see these things differently. We're going to stand for things here at Truth Community but we are mindful of the fact that there are good men who differ on these things and so I'm not pretending to stand up here and give you the final word of prophecy that silences all the disputes about the rapture and the millennium and future judgment. What we're doing here today is we are simply saying, under the eye of God and mindful of our accountability this is what we teach as a church, this is what we believe, this is what our pulpit stands for.

Let me approach it this way: the title of this message is "What happens next?" What happens next? Here we are in the church age, as it were, and the question is, "What happens next?" What's going to come next? What is God's purpose that he has revealed in Scripture for what is going to come? Let me just give you a little bit of an overview statement here to start: even Christians that differ with what we're going to say in fullness of the message, what could we all agree on? Every true Christian should agree on this and have his heart set on the truth of what I'm about to say. What happens next? Jesus Christ will return to earth and bring human history to a close. He will raise the living and the dead and he will judge them. He will usher in an eternal state in which God will bless the saints and the saints will glorify God forever. The wicked, he will cast into everlasting torment away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. That's what happens next. Beloved, what we're saying is: the world as we know it, the only world that we have ever experienced, the only world that our children have ever known, is going to come to an end. Jesus Christ is supernaturally going to appear and he is going to execute the plan of God and bring it to pass and there is nothing that the nations, the Presidents, the Kings, there is nothing that the world leaders can do to stop him because Christ is sovereign over all, Christ has his intentions for the world and for the church and he will most certainly bring them to pass. And what is coming in a time that we cannot identify because Scripture says no man knows that hour, in a time that is coming that is certain in occurrence but the timing of which we don't know, Christ is going to appear and this world as we know it is going to come to an end. That's what comes next.

Now, I think it's fair to say that Christians would agree on that broad outline. They would define some of the details differently and they would differ sharply on some of what fills it out but, in general, I think that you would find Christians of all persuasions, you would have to agree that Christ is going to bodily return and he is going to usher in an eternal state that will be completely different from anything this world has known. We want to see the big picture and then dive into the details and that's what we see. But let's say this before we go in any further: beloved, fellow Christians, those born-again by the Spirit of God, what this means for you and me, however you paint in the details of everything else that follows, what comes out of this is the fact that we as Christians have a bright hope and a glorious future. We do not have to fear and tremble at what we see going on in the world around us. You do not have to live in fear and discouragement and despair. You do

not have to sink into the depths of discouragement and anxiety about life because the reality of what is certain to come triumphs over all of that. We are not living for this world. What I said in the prayer earlier is very true: we are pilgrims passing through; we're not ultimately about what we can achieve with our careers in this life; we're not ultimately about exactly how our family turns out; we're not about seeing certain political things come to pass and our preferred candidates in office and the ones that we dislike defeated. That's not why we live. That's not why we exist. That's not what Christ saved us for. He saved us for that which is still future to us today. He saved for an eternal dwelling place with him in the presence of God where we will glorify Christ for our salvation, where sin and wickedness will be permanently banished and we will be in the blessed presence of God in all of his glory, perfected with all of the rest of the saints never to sin again, never to suffer again, never to weep again and to somehow dwell in the midst of eternal blessedness that will never end and will never get old.

That's what comes next. It's only when you see life from that perspective that you're going to set your heart affections where they need to be. These things change how you look at life and how you look at the world. Our disposition as Christians is optimistic, not pessimistic. We're sunny, not gloomy. Our hearts are encouraged, not depressed. All because of what God has in store in the future. All because of what happens next. Not what happens next week, what happens next in the purposes of God. And so it's with that perspective that we come and I believe that the Scriptures teach a certain outworking of events in a sequence that will achieve the purposes of God which he established in the biblical covenants in the Old Testament: the Abrahamic, the Davidic and the New Covenant. I believe that God is operating on a timetable; God is operating according to purposes that he established and began to reveal in the Old Testament and which carry forward through in the New Testament and were unchanged by subsequent revelation, that the New Testament expands upon what God said in the Old Testament was going to happen, he didn't reverse it. That's what I believe. That's what we teach from this pulpit.

So, in the purpose of God, what happens next? I'm going to lay out six things for you. What I believe the Scriptures teach happens next is: 1. The rapture. The rapture. If you'll turn to 1 Thessalonians 4. The rapture refers to the time when Christ Jesus will come from heaven for his people and Christians will be raised to meet him in the air. This is an event that could occur at any time. It's an event that could occur before I finish this sentence...but it didn't. But it could happen before I finish this sentence...but it didn't. 1 Thessalonians 4:13. We are looking for, we are waiting for, Christ to do what Paul described here in 1 Thessalonians 4. Verse 13, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus," a metaphor for death, those Christians who had died. Verse 15, "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord," you see, Paul was writing as though it could happen in his lifetime. "We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together

with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.” Verse 18, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” I believe that that's the next thing that happens in God's eschatological plan is that Christ is going to come from heaven and with a glorious shout, the dead in Christ will be raised first, those who are alive and are Christians at the time will follow them and we will be joined together in the air with Christ.

Now, I want to tell you something: whatever else you think about the rapture, whatever else you think about the timing of it, whatever else you think about happens before or after, let me say that Scripture teaches this aspect of it clearly and he says that we are going to be raised to meet Christ in the air and do you know what that moment is going to be like? That is going to be glorious! That is going to be victory! We are going to be part of a supernatural work of Christ that translates us out of this world and into his presence where we will thus always be with him. I have no idea what the details of that are going to be like and I think a lot of foolish things have been written about what happens exactly at the moment of the rapture but, beloved, look at verse 17 there with me again. Those of you who are Christians, this is what the future holds for us: we will be caught up with the saints in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and we will always be with the Lord. Do you know what? Nothing about the most pressing things in your life today, the most discouraging things that are happening in your family, in your career, none of that is going to be significant when this great moment occurs. The glory of this moment, the glory of being with Christ in the air, is so totally going to dwarf anything that has happened in life that anything difficult that has happened in life is going to seem like a small price to pay to be a part of that great glorious moment with Christ in the air. That is going to be glory. That is going to be a time of victory. And I can't wait. What Christ has ahead for us, he's going to come for us like he said in John 14, “If I go away, I'll come back. I'll come for you.” We have a certain word from our Lord Jesus Christ that he is not going to leave us like orphans. He is not going to abandon us. He would never leave us under the sore afflictions that this life brings, leave us under those in a permanent state of being. No, he's going to come for us and in a supernatural moment of glory, we're going to be with him and everything that preceded that is going to pale into insignificance by comparison to the fact that we're here, we're a part of this, everything that Scripture said is beginning to come true. That's what comes next.

Now, turn over to 2 Corinthians 5, if you would. Somehow as part of Christ coming for his people, there will be a time of accountability for us before our Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:10. One day when we teach through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, we'll go into a whole lot more detail about this but that's quite a ways away. Verse 10, actually let's back up to verse 8. We looked at that verse last week but I want to back up to verse 8 so that you can see that he's talking about believers in this context. In verse 8 he says, “we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.” He's talking about Christians here and then he draws an inference out of that by the word “for.” He's still talking about Christians, about believers here in verse 10 when he says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has

done, whether good or bad.” Scripture says that what comes next, what lies ahead for us as believers is this: there is coming a time for us even as believers where we are going to stand before Christ and give an account to him for what we have done in our body.

Now, let me hasten to say that this is not a time where Christ is going to call out our sins. He's already dealt with our sins at the cross. He's not going to bring them up again and chastise us for our sins at this Judgment Seat, rather if you look at verse 10, this is a time of recompense, this is a time of reward. This is a time where Christ rewards us for what we have done in the body. Here's the way I think we should think about this: Christ is going to evaluate our lives to set the reward that we receive for our faithfulness to him. This is a time of reward, not a time of judgment and those that have been faithful to Christ will be greatly rewarded. Somehow, beloved, this Judgment Seat of Christ is going to affect our eternity. Not in the sense of whether we go to heaven or whether we go to hell but somehow the extent of blessing that we enjoy in eternity, somehow the extent of what we're able to do in eternity is going to be set by Christ at this Judgment Seat as he looks on us with grace, with mercy and yet with perfect wisdom and clarity of mind he's going to say, “Here is your reward for your service to me.” Now look, that should have a pretty sanctifying affect on us to realize that as a Christian is not a throw-away session. Your life as a Christian is not something that you just casually toss away on the latest worldly entertainment or the latest worldly thing that you want to do. We need to be living life in conscious recognition of the fact that there is a day of accountability coming for each one of us. We're going to stand before Christ and he is going to recompense us for how we've lived our lives. Wow! Wow! That means that this life is serious, that what we do matters. That there's more than simply avoiding hell and somehow going to heaven. That Christ is going to look at us and evaluate our lives and give us recompense in judgment. Again, not in a sense of eternal judgment and in hell for our sins, that's not what Paul is talking about here. Remember, he's talking to Christians and he's said already that “to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.” He said that “thus we will always be with the Lord,” and so he's not going to send us out of his presence, those of us that truly know Christ, but he's going to evaluate you. He's going to evaluate me.

As I look out on your blessed faces, I'm mindful of the fact that you're going to stand before him face-to-face and you're going to stand before him to give an account for yourself and, beloved, I want that day to go well for you. I want that day to go well for you. I want you to hear Christ says, “Well done thou good and faithful servant. Well done. You were faithful to my word. You were faithful in what I called you to do.” I want that to go well for you and the only way that that day is going to go well for you is if you set your priorities according to Scripture, not according to your worldly affections and desires. And the only way that you're really going to be motivated to do that seriously is to realize that this day of accountability is coming. Oh beloved, take it seriously now so that you're blessed then. Your life matters. What you choose to do with your time and the patterns and the habits that you establish, these things matter. We're living out what we're going to give an account for.

And so, it should humble us. It should sober us. And yet, as I said, it should fill us with hope and with glory and victory because I want you to understand that Christ is going to judge us in sympathy as well; he's not going to stop being gracious in how he deals with us. Those of you, just to illustrate this a bit, those of you that have experienced isolation because of your faith in Christ, Christ is going to remember that and honor you for your faithfulness to him in it. Those of you that have wept tears because the Christian life has proven to be difficult for you and you've clung to Christ where there was no light that you could see, so to speak, speaking metaphorically, but you clung to Christ and you persevered in the midst of it. Those of you that wept, that know what it's like to weep at the tombs of your loved ones and say, "Oh Christ, this hurts so much." This moment at the Judgment Seat of Christ is when Christ is going to look at you and he is going to bless you and reward you and say, "I saw it all. I saw how you clung to me and now, my beloved, I bless you. I reward you for your simple faithfulness when it was most difficult to do." This is wonderful. This is wonderful. Those of you that have known isolation, those of you that have been rejected because of your faithfulness to Christ, pay-day is coming and the pay-day is going to be great and it's going to be glorious and it's going to be generous because Christ will never forget your faithfulness to him. So, as we contemplate what happens next, when we contemplate the fact that Christ will make everything right in the end, it motivates us to be holy; it motivates us to persevere; it motivates us to be optimistic. "Christ will be with me. Christ will reward me in the end and therefore I will persevere with renewed hope."

Secondly, after the rapture, once Christ has removed his people from the world, a time of trouble is about to come upon the remaining inhabitants of the earth and Scripture refers to this as the Tribulation Period. 2. The Tribulation Period. The tribulation is a time when God will pour out his judgment on the unbelieving world and much of the world's population will perish as God pours out his wrath upon men. Turn to Revelation 16. We're not at all going to look to everything that underlies this. Again, this is a survey; this is a sampling. Nothing more, nothing less. Revelation 16. Those of you who are not Christians, Revelation 16 is giving you a preview of what lies ahead for you with what happens next. I tremble at the thought of it. I pray to God that you would tremble too and that the fear of the Lord would be the beginning of wisdom, that the recognition of the seriousness of God's future plans that he intends to punish sin, that he will punish unbelief, would motivate you to repentance. Revelation 16:1, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.' So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died. Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, 'Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.' And I heard the altar saying, 'Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.'"

This reminds me of an illustration that happened, I don't know, 10-12 years ago, that illustrates all of this perfectly. When my son was much, much, much younger, this is not a recent event, maybe he was 8 or 9. We were on a roller coaster ride waiting for it to start. This is true and what I'm about to describe to you is consciously occurring to me while we were going through the loops of that roller coaster. This is to give you a sense of what lies ahead for those who do not know Christ when he comes. We're in this roller coaster and it's one of those that shoots you straight out and then you go through a loop and so you go from 0 to 60 in like, I think they said 2.8 seconds. So, we've had a fun day and on the tame rides and all of that but now we're on this roller coaster that we have never been on before. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, boom! And in less than 2 seconds, we're going I think it may have been as I'm recalling it now, it may have been 80 miles an hour and we're shot immediately into a loop. We go upside down and we're screaming. We're not screaming vocally but we're going screaming fast and we're on this thing and the power of this is completely beyond our control. We are at the mercy of a force and a power that we cannot stop and in the midst of this, my dear blessed son, who now would design something like this and consider that tame, I've got to exonerate him from this. He was little; he was a boy, now he's a man. But he was a boy. He didn't understand what was happening and he cried out as we were going up that loop and upside down at phenomenal speeds and at forces that were utterly beyond us and he cried out, "I don't like this!" and he was scared and he was frightened and he wanted it to be over but it would not stop. He couldn't stop it.

Do you understand that when God pours out his wrath upon the earth, do you understand when God starts to unveil his judgment, people who have ignored him, who have rejected and mocked Christ, who have lived lives of sin and mocked the Scriptures and mocked those who love Christ and seek to be faithful to his word, who have only known the superficiality of this world, do you understand that what's going to happen in this time of tribulation to them is going to be far more profound but the same spirit is going to animate them, "I don't like this!" and it's not going to stop. The sheer terror that is about to fall upon the world when God pours out his judgment is going to be horrific. It is going to be frightening and it's going to be beyond their power to stop. This is what judgment is going to be like: a frightening time of the wrath of God being poured out upon the world.

At the end of that time, Christ is going to return with finality in the Second Coming of Christ, point 3 here. At the end of this time as God is pouring out these supernatural judgments, at the end of that time, Christ is going to come. Look at Revelation 19:11 where it says in sequence to what had gone before, the Apostle John says, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations." This is a time of judgment, final judgment, "and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of kings



and Lord of lords.” Christ is going to come with great power and glory and he is coming to set final judgment into motion.

John goes on and describes what that will look like and says that he's going to bind Satan so that Satan can no longer deceive the nations. Look at Revelation 20:1 where it says, “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.” And so Scripture describes this coming of Christ as a supernatural appearance where he comes at the end of God pouring out wrath upon the world and Christ comes in supernatural glory and begins to execute another step in the plan. He binds Satan and casts him down into the abyss so that he is not able to continue his deceptive work.

And then when Satan has been bound and Christ is present on the earth, point 4, the millennium. The millennium refers to a thousand year period of time in which Christ is going to reign on the earth. The Old Testament prophets spoke of this in advance. Speaking of those Old Testament prophets, I want to take you to Ezekiel 37 where God spoke of a future kingdom for Israel, a future earthly kingdom. Here and in other places, we're using Ezekiel 37 as a representative passage. Look at verse 21 as he's speaking to the tribes of Israel, he says, “Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land,"'” he's talking about a physical location, not a spiritual reality, verse 22, “and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms,” speaking of the split between Israel and Judah. Verse 23, “They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.”

Now, stay with me, verse 24, “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever,” an indeterminate length of time he says in this prophecy, “and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.” God promised a future kingdom to Israel in the Old Testament. The fullness of what he has promised has not yet been fulfilled. I believe that Scripture teaches that in Revelation 20 we are seeing the fulfillment of God's promise to his people.

Turn back to Revelation 20:4, “Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life,” look at this, “and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” A thousand years. A thousand years. A thousand years. A thousand years.

In the prophecy of Habakkuk 2:14 it says, “For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea.” When Christ is reigning on the earth, when Satan is bound, when his saints are reigning with him and Christ is enforcing righteousness on the earth and Israel has been given its place of prominence among the nations, there is going to be at that time the glory of God on display on earth and it's going to be known throughout this entire globe. God is going to keep his promise to Israel. He's going to give them that nation where their King, the son of David, the supreme son of David, Christ, reigns and what God promised to the nation in the Old Testament will be fulfilled in that time. It will be a kingdom marked by righteousness and peace on the earth, not just in heaven.

Now, the Apostle John goes on and describes final judgments after the end of the millennium. Look at Revelation 20:7, again in sequence, “When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.” This is the final defeat of Satan. He'd been held in prison for a thousand years, here's his final defeat. Verse 10, “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Final judgment on Satan, verse 11, final judgment on unbelievers

Look at verse 11, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.” Verse 14, “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Cast into final, eternal judgment by the righteous hand of God. Cast into final judgment away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Cast

into final judgment with the devil who not only deceived them but whose deception they willingly embraced.

This is horrific but this is what comes next and, beloved, I want you to understand that the sober nature of final judgment on the devil and on unbelievers should cause to be birthed in your heart a holy reverence and a holy respect for the holiness of God. God does not trifle with sin. He will not forever endure the rebellion of sinners against him. We look at this and we see the righteousness of God on full display, every crime finding its perfect punishment, every violation of the eternal character and righteousness of God finding its eternal meat, its eternal recompense. You can't violate the law of an eternal God without expecting to incur an eternal punishment in response. God will vindicate his holiness.

Beloved, that is why the gospel is so urgent to you today. This is so very urgent. If you don't know Christ, I just described your eternity to you. I beg you, you young people, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16 years old, pay heed. Don't assume that you can sort this out later. Don't assume that you have time. Now is the time for you when Christ says, "I'll forgive all of your sins. Just come to me and I will never cast you out. I'll receive you. I'll make you my own. I'll cleanse you. I'll forgive your guilt. I'll make you mine. Just come." Come to him. Come to Christ because I don't want this judgment to fall on you. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "I beg you, be reconciled to God."

For the rest of us, point 6: the eternal state. The eternal state. As we pivot from the destruction of the wicked to the blessing that God has for us and there are moments, probably not nearly frequent enough when I teach, there are moments where you are conscious that you're about to talk about things that are so holy and so magnificent that you understand why Moses was commanded to remove his sandals at the burning bush. What we're about to see here is so glorious and magnificent, the things that God has in store for those whom he loves, the things that he has in store for us who are Christians, who for a short period of time endure momentary light affliction for the sake of an eternal weight of glory that is far greater than comparison could grant. Praise be to God that this is where it ends for us. What we have right now on this earth is as bad as it's going to be.

What happens next, John begins to describe in Revelation 21:1. This is our future. We're going to see this, fellow Christians. We're going to be there. We're going to belong in this glorious realm of unspeakable glory. Verse 1, the eternal state, John says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'" Verse 4, "and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

He goes on and describes it more in chapter 22, verse 1, “Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him.” Look at this, verse 4, “they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.” He will possess us because we belong to him. We're his people now but then there's going to be a fuller experience and possession of it. We are going to see the unhindered glory of God face-to-face. We are going to be in the presence of Christ with sin and the curse of sin removed. We are going to be in a realm that we can't imagine here because the only thing that we know has to be filtered through sin hampered minds and our finiteness but based on the testimony of God, we can see that the eternal state that lies ahead for us is a place where there is no more crying, no more mourning, no more pain, that's the negative side of it. On the positive side, we are going to be with Christ forever. We are going to see his face in an atmosphere of perfect peace, perfect joy, perfect blessing, unspeakable glory. And our first moment of it, if you can speak about eternity in terms of time, our first moment of it is going to be unspeakably great and ten thousand eons later, it's not going to be diminished.

Some of the older writers though that part of our blessing in heaven will just be the continual unfolding of the glory of God in greater degrees to us. I don't know if you can directly support that from Scripture but the point is that what happens next, using “next” in a pretty elastic way, what happens next for us after this life is over, what lies ahead is a glorious future of the unfolding purposes of God where he will fulfill his promises to his people and we are going to be a part of something that is so magnificent that eye cannot see it, ear cannot hear it, our brains can't imagine, this is going to be so unspeakably beyond all that we could ask or think.

Are you a Christian? That's what comes next. Glory! Glory! Glory! Glory! In the presence of the one who is holy, holy, holy. In the presence of the one who shed blood after blood after blood for the redemption of our sins because he was motivated by the very, very, very deep, deep, deep love of Jesus. We don't have the capacity to understand how great that's going to be right now. We don't have the capacity to adequately thank God for including us in such a great eternal plan. But we don't have to understand it all to say, “This is going to be great.” We don't have to understand it all to come back to those three words to say that, “I'm a Christian. I have a great, great hope. I am going to know great, great glory. I'm going to be a part of the eternal victory of my Lord, of my Christ, of the one who shed his blood for me. He's going to be a Victor over world history, of the nations who opposed him and he deigned to include me in the plan.” That's what comes next. That's what we get to share in in the future.

Now, this is all very practical for our lives today and I want to close on this: in light of what happens next, what do we do now? Whenever I preach on heaven, seeing Christ face-to-face, you go to that mental realm and it's hard to step out of it. I'll be honest, I don't want to step out of that realm. I want to park my mind right there. You know, you

think about Elijah going out on a chariot of glory. He didn't taste death; the Lord just took him out on a chariot of glory. What a great way, what a great time it would be for Christ to come when we're in the midst of talking about the eternal state, the glory that's to come, to just go up and be swept into heaven while you're already talking about it and just go up there just like that. Ah, that would be cool. That would be the way to go out. But if the Lord's going to tarry and give us another hour of life here, what do we do now? Two things I want to say as we close, practical applications. What do we do now? First of all, we live holy lives. Go to 2 Peter 3. We're not looking for what God can do for us in this life primarily, that's very secondary. 2 Peter 3:13, "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." There's where we bank our hope. Not that God's going to change my circumstances or alleviate my problems today or sometime in this life, where our hope is anchored is in this new heavens and this new earth that is coming where righteousness dwells. That's what we're looking for. That's what we're living for. In verse 14, he says, "Therefore," because you're looking for that, "beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." Let your expectation of the future influence your character today. We're patient in trials because blessing is coming. We turn from sin because righteousness is coming. That's what we do next.

One last question, the same question: in light of what happens next, what do we do now? Revelation 22. You can see why the Bible ends on this note. In light of what happens next, what do we do now? We long for the return of Christ. Verse 20, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." There is the prayer of a redeemed heart having heard the unfolding of God's plan for the future. You want to know if you're a Christian? Ask yourself this question: in light of what we've talked about here today, is your response, "Come, Lord Jesus, come! Come quickly! I want to see you! I want to see this thing that happens next." That's the heart of a Christian. An unbeliever couldn't care less. The heart of a Christian sees in this his hope, his victory and his glory.

Beloved, bringing it all down to one simple final conclusion here. Concluding an entire doctrinal series here brings us all to this one point: you and I who are Christians, we do not live for this world, we live for what happens next.

Bow with me in prayer.

Lord Jesus, amen. Come quickly! Come quickly! Put an end to the mocking of your name. Put an end to those who reject your word. Put an end to that which is opposed to your righteousness and your glory and your truth and your grace and your mercy. Lord Jesus, come quickly! Come today so that we would no longer be waiting but that we would see the fulfillment of your purposes and we would see your glory on display. We give you thanks, O God, for you give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ and if you see it fit to tarry, to wait just a little while longer then, Father, I pray for these people in front of me that they would be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord and that they would know that their toil is not in vain in Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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