

# What Happens Next?

*Together in Truth*

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Well, we come to the concluding message in this series that we've titled "Together in Truth." We've been separated physically but we've drawn closer together in spirit as we've considered the truth of God's word on the whole broad sweep of theology and just to remind you of where we've been over the past three weeks, we have seen the authority of Scripture, we have seen the nature of God in both his attributes and his Triune nature, we saw the nature of our enemy the devil, we have seen the nature of man, the fall of man into sin, God's plan of salvation and all that Christ accomplished for us at the cross, we have seen the nature of the church and why the church exists. Last night we looked at what happens when we die, we answered that question in a twofold way, are you a Christian or not, your destiny depends on that, your eternal destiny depends on that. It's pretty important stuff and one of the things that we see, I think, if we could just look at the whole of those things, is that we're seeing how much more there is to our existence and our purpose in life than the mere things that we do and what happens in the world around us. These wonderful truths from Scripture elevate us to the transcendent. They take us to the things that are true and enduring and lasting, and these are the things that you and I need to ground everything about our lives in. It needs to be the basis of the way that we view all of the world, it needs to be the basis by which we interpret what is happening around us and, my friends, it needs to be that upon which we set our hope and the reason for our existence, and I just feel compelled to just say a brief word about that, that these things in the Scripture are the charter by which we live, these are the things that determine everything that we think and that we expect and the reasons that we live. The Bible is more important than the United States Constitution. I hope that's apparent and an immediately obvious statement to you because the Bible is eternal truth, and as much as we might appreciate the privileges that we have under the United States Constitution, it is, after all, merely a human document. The Bible is God's word and the Bible speaks to that which is eternal and the Bible reveals the Lord Jesus Christ to us, and the Bible reveals to us what he has done for our salvation and in the Bible alone we find the message of salvation from our sins, and it is no diminishment of the United States Constitution to say it does none of those things; that a man cannot find hope for his eternal soul in the Constitution, he cannot find forgiveness of his sins in the words of James Madison. Friends, that should be just so plainly obvious to us all that we begin to view things in a proper perspective. When we put our hope in the words of Scripture, we have something that is abiding and that is why we have spent these weeks, these past three weeks viewing the sweep of the doctrine of what the Bible teaches.

So today we come to the final thing that is left to consider. The message today is titled "What Happens Next?" And that's kind of a loaded question in the sense that it's not talking about what happens tomorrow but what is next in God's eternal plan. What is God's next step in the unfolding of his eternal purpose for the world. What is he going to do next and that's what we want to consider. We're looking into what the Bible says about the future and what the next step in God's program is.

Now we need to set the stage for how we're going to approach this. The biblical material on future events is utterly massive and we are only going to spend one message, 60 minutes or so on the matter, and so we're not going to be comprehensive in any sense. One writer says this, he says that 27% of the Bible involves predictive material. He numbers it as 8,352 verses out of the total of 31,124 verses in the Bible. That is the amount of material that in one manner or another is looking to things that were future at the time that it was written. Over 8,300 verses dealing with matters that pertain to the future.

Now why would I start with that? Well, the first thing that you and I need to understand is that the sheer volume of material should give us pause before we get too dogmatic about anything that we say about exactly what's going to happen in the future. S. Lewis Johnson, who is now in heaven, was a longtime professor at Dallas Seminary and also at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, a fine pastor in Dallas, Texas and also a man of great skill in theology, he said this as he looks to, as he spoke about future events and 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. 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." To the words of Dr. Johnson we could add the words of Charles Spurgeon who said this, he said, "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." So we're cautioned by the volume of material that contributes to the total picture of what the Bible says. We're cautioned by these men of great skill and decades of experience in studying and teaching the word of God that tell us that this is difficult and we need to be humble as we approach the subject, and it's in that spirit that I teach here this morning as we deal with these matters.

What happens next? What happens next? Let's start with an overview statement. Let's start with an overview statement. Jesus Christ will return to earth and he will bring human history as we've known it to a close. He will raise the living and the dead and judge them. He will usher in an eternal state in which God will bless the saints and they will glorify him forever. The wicked will be cast into everlasting torment away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Let me repeat that summary statement again because it kind of gives us the scaffolding upon which we want to build upon in the rest of our time together. Jesus Christ will return to earth and bring human history to a close. He will raise the living and the dead and 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 will be cast into everlasting torment away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Friends, before we get into further details, these are the critical elements for us to understand that as we read in John 14 a little earlier, Jesus Christ will come again. The world as we know it is not indefinite. Christ will come at a time of his knowledge and of his choosing and the order of the world is going to be permanently altered by his return. That is coming. In addition to the return of Christ, on a human level we must understand that there is a time of judgment that is coming. Those that are in Christ will be received into heaven. Those that are not in Christ, that have rejected the Gospel, the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, they will be judged for their sins and they will be cast away from God into a place of eternal torment as the just punishment for all of their sins, rebellion and denial of a God who has been revealed to them in the skies and in the Scriptures. And so thus the eternal destinies of men will be set, the righteous into heaven to be blessed and to glorify God forever, the wicked to be judged and sent into hell for torment forever and ever. These are the key things for us to understand and if you get lost in the details of other things, the clarity of those basic concepts is essential for your understanding. Christ will come again. There will be a time of judgment. There will be an eternal state of two different dimensions for the saved and for the lost. If you can grasp those things, you have a basic understanding of what happens next.

Now for all of the clarity of those things and we'll explore those in some greater depth here in a moment, for all of the clarity of those things that I think that all Christians would agree on in the simple way that I have stated them there today, for all of the clarity of the broad strokes of those things, Christians will agree on that outline but they differ sharply on the details of the intervening aspects of this. And so when I speak on prophecy and when I speak on the matters that we're addressing here today, to the best of my ability I'm trying to speak on matters that I realize are difficult, that better men than me have struggled with, and so I'm approaching it with a matter of humility and I would encourage you as an individual Christian to understand that whatever your convictions are about future events, that you would likewise hold them with a sense of humility because better men, let me put it this way just to speak personally about it, better men than I see things differently than what I'm about to say to you, and so I am not trying to give the final word today that will silence all the disputes forever about the rapture, the millennium, and future judgment. I'm not pretending to do that and so I would ask you to receive the message in that way.

We're just giving an outline here, giving themes here, and with that said at the same time let me make a polemic statement, a statement not of attack but just to clarify and to sharpen some of the distinctions that I think need to be said. Strident advocates of the various systems of understanding end times, stating it technically, strident advocates of different eschatological systems are often not forthcoming about the weaknesses of their own positions. It is easy to make a caricature of one particular system that you don't agree with, highlight all of its weaknesses, speak about the strengths of your own weaknesses and make it look like you have settled the matter and that this is all easy and an easily resolved matter. That's not true. Every system of interpretation of future prophecy has significant weaknesses that it has to accommodate and if we are true and honest with each other about the matter, we realize that we are making interpretive decisions that

have their difficulties attached to them, and someone who doesn't acknowledge that really isn't being honest about it, and someone who is merely looking to make another man look foolish, a Christian brother foolish, is really not honoring in my humble opinion, is not honoring the nature of Scripture and the holiness of God in the complexity of the matters that we are dealing with. There are problems with every view of every aspect of future events and so we need to understand that.

So as a first matter, it is involved and it is complex. Secondly, there's something that I want to say here is that men, good men, godly men, established teachers whose works have stood the test of time, godly men who otherwise agree on biblical authority, on theology proper, on the nature of salvation, they often disagree on eschatological matters, eschatology being the study of last things, that's what this message is about. That should give ordinary people like you and me, that should give us a pause, that should cause us to pause in the way that we handle these things. It is not that we should not have convictions about eschatology, and it is not that we shouldn't teach on eschatology. If that were the case, I wouldn't be doing this message. But this is an area of theology in which I believe we should be particularly measured in how we speak about it. I may disagree, and I do, with an amillennialist and I'm going to throw out a couple of names here that many of you won't be familiar with but it will make me feel better to say this, I may disagree with an amillennialist like Anthony Hoekema or I may disagree with a post-millennialist like Lorraine Bettner, but I understand that those men were no fools. These were not men who treated Scripture in a light manner. They were not superficial in their handling of Scripture and it would be a violation of Christian love for me to mock these men or to act like they were stupid in what they had to say. Yeah, I used that word. I know some of you kids aren't supposed to use that word. Sorry about that, parents. You can sort that out with your kids later. At the same time, to those who disagree with the things that I'm about to say, I would say this on the other side, men like S. Lewis Johnson or John MacArthur, do you know what? Those men aren't fools either. These aren't men who have not considered the matter. These aren't men who are acting blindly and just interpreting Scripture willy-nilly in a way that does not give reverence to the things of Scripture. So in addition to wanting to give a broad outline of eschatology as we did here at the start, I also want to make that statement to my brothers in ministry, I'm really speaking beyond the walls of Truth Community Church in what I have to say here right now, speaking beyond the walls of the church, that it is fitting for us in light of the complexity of the material, in light of the fact that good men disagree with these things, for us to be measured in what we speak even as we set forth what our convictions are.

I want to say something here that in my opinion illustrates what I'm talking about and shows the spirit that I am opposing and disagreeing with. I know of a theology professor, he is no longer living, he's now with the Lord, but I know of a theology professor who spoke about men who disagreed with him on matters of eschatology and he made a shocking statement in my hearing, he said to a small group of us that were gathered together, he said that he questioned the salvation of men who disagreed with him. And without going into the details of his position or of the men that he disagreed with, friends, that is a bad way to do theology and that is a bad way to handle these things and nothing about this discussion merits that kind of hostility and that kind of exclusivity and that

kind of attitude that was being expressed in that. So that's why I say these things. We need to be measured in how that we speak about them to realize that the men who disagree with us are still worthy of respect. I would say this, that men who differ with me on eschatology, some of them I would still gladly welcome into this pulpit to teach our congregation, not to disagree with us on our positions on eschatology but on other matters that we agree on; I would gladly welcome men to our pulpit who would teach on other matters of biblical authority even though they differ with me on this particular issue. So that is very important for us to understand that there is some theological modesty that is needed on all sides of the discussion.

Now with that said and with all of that preparatory ground laid, with that foundation poured, so to speak, let me also say this, that for all of those qualifications of modesty and humility with which I speak in the remainder of this message, I do want to be forthcoming and to use the common human phrase, I'm happy to put all of my cards on the table here in what I'm about to say and in what I believe here this morning, and some of what I'm saying for those of you that are new in the faith, some of what I'm about to say may go over your head and be things that you're not familiar with. That's okay, we're simply laying down markers for the totality of everything that will be reviewed in this message by others in the days to come, and I just want to be very forthcoming and honest and candid in what I believe here. I am not amillennial and I never will be. I do not believe that the present age in which we live is the millennium. I do not believe that. I do not believe that Satan is presently bound and I do not believe that the church has replaced the nation of Israel as many men teach. I reject the interpretive decisions that lead to that conclusion. That's the negative side. On the positive side, I believe that the Abrahamic, Davidic and new covenants have implications for the still future history of national Israel. I believe that the New Testament extends the work of the Old Testament prophets rather than contradicting them or reinterpreting them. And I believe that those who try to limit the debate about the millennium, those who say the millennial debate is only over one text in Revelation 20 are guilty of a false reduction of the issues that is a discredit to the discussion that needs to take place on these matters. I am not amillennial, I am not post-millennial, and I never will be. That's the nature of things.

So with those parameters said, we understand, I understand as I'm speaking here today, I'm not giving the final word, I'm not even trying to do so but having said those things just now, I want you to understand that I'm not speaking lightly or without consideration of the other issues that we're not going to talk about here today. So with all of those qualifications in place, let's talk about what we believe is coming next. What happens next? What is the future plan of God as we understand and interpret Scripture here at Truth Community Church? Well, there are six aspects that I want to lay out for you here today and if you're taking notes and I hope that at least some of you are, I'm going to lay these things out because there's a sequence to what we understand the future holds, we're going to lay these things out in sequence and I'll summarize them now and then we'll go back and look at the texts that we point to to support our understanding of Scripture in this way. What happens next? Well, we believe that the rapture happens next. The rapture which is followed by a tribulation period. The rapture and then a tribulation period. Following the tribulation period is the Second Coming of Christ to earth. And after that

Second kept coming, there is the period of time known as the millennium, a 1,000 year period of time in which Jesus Christ is reigning on the earth. After the millennium come the final judgments. And after the final judgments comes the eternal state. So as we have tried to put together the biblical teaching on matters, we see the rapture and then the tribulation, and after the tribulation the Second Coming of Christ, after which comes the millennium, and then final judgments, and then the eternal state. Those six segments of future events is what happens next.

So let's look at these briefly together. First of all, we consider the rapture. The rapture. What is the rapture? What does that term mean? Well, the rapture refers to that time when Jesus Christ will come from heaven for his people and the Christians who are alive at that time will be raised to meet him in the air, and finally we get to a point where we can turn to some Scripture now. In 1 Thessalonians 4, I invite you to turn there, 1 Thessalonians 4 is our text that we are turning to right now and in verse 13 it says this, 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and following. The Apostle Paul said,

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. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 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, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 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. 17 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.

We believe that this passage is teaching a rapture in which Christ comes and calls forth the dead in Christ and calls forth those alive in Christ to join him and he gathers his people out of the world and brings them to himself and brings them into heaven. The rapture is imminent. The rapture is imminent by which we mean it could occur at any time. The rapture could occur before I finish this sentence. Apparently it didn't but the rapture can occur at any moment. There is nothing that needs to happen before the rapture can occur and so the rapture speaks to this coming of Christ for his people.

Now after the rapture and we're including this, we're including some other facets of future events under this one topic, after the rapture the people of Christ will appear before him in judgment. They will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and I would invite you to turn to 2 Corinthians 5 as we consider this. 2 Corinthians 5 beginning in verse 8. 2 Corinthians 5 beginning, actually let's start in verse 6. 2 Corinthians 5:6 Paul says,

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- [in other words while we are alive on earth we are not in the immediate presence of Christ] 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight-- 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer

rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 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.

Paul is speaking here in the context of believers appearing before Christ at the judgment seat of Christ.

Now it's important to understand what is happening here. This is not a judgment in which our eternal destiny is going to be decided as if it was still an open question about whether people who are in Christ would actually enter into the kingdom and be in heaven with him forever. No, that's not the point of this judgment. You see, Christ has already paid for our sins at the cross. The eternal outcome of our destination has already been secured for us. That is not the point of this judgment, rather the judgment seat of Christ which occurs for believers after the rapture is a time in which he evaluates our Christian lives for the purpose of this, he evaluates our Christian lives in order to reward us for our faithfulness to him. And so somehow this judgment will be based on the tenor in which we have lived our lives. Christ will look at the totality of our lives and evaluate it and reward us for our faithfulness to him. Those who have only been somewhat faithful will receive somehow a reward that is fitting for that. Those that have been more faithful will receive a reward that is in greater measure to that. However that works out, Christ will do it in righteousness, he will do it in perfect wisdom, and the point here is that he will reward us for our service to him during our earthly lives. That has the effect of investing the way that we live with great eternal consequences. Somehow in a way that I don't profess to be able to search out the details of, somehow the way that you and I live as Christians will affect the reward that we receive and that we will carry with us into the eternal state. Somehow it will affect our blessing in glory and we'll just trust Christ for that and leave that there at this time. But Christ will rapture his people, he will gather his people together to be with him and then there will be this element of a reward-focused judgment that he gives to his people at that time.

Now after that, secondly what will come is the tribulation. Once Jesus Christ has removed his people from the world, a time of trouble will come upon the remaining inhabitants of the earth and this is what's known for our second point as the tribulation period. The rapture and then the tribulation period, and the tribulation is the time when God pours out judgment on the unbelieving world and during this time much of the world's population will perish. They will die under the judgment hand of God and their physical lives will come to an end as God pours out his judgment on the world for its rebellion against him.

To see a text that pertains to this, turn to Revelation 16, beginning in verse 1. Revelation 16, beginning in verse 1.

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." 2 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. 3 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. 4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. 5 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; 6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." 7 And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

Now there is much more to this in Scripture, it's not our purpose this morning to explore it all, simply saying that in the book of Revelation which speaks of the things which are yet to come, we see this time of judgment of God pouring out judgment upon the earth through his holy angels and the world experiencing judgment for its rejection of Christ, its rebellion against God and its persecution of God's people. One of the things that enables us as believers and speaking broadly across the course of time, one of the things that enables believers to persevere through times of unjust treatment and persecution, times much more severe than anything we are suffering right now at least in America, is we persevere through those things knowing that God sees, that God knows and that God will vindicate us in the end; that the wickedness of the world against the people of God will not go unpunished; that there is a time when the world will answer for the way that it has treated the people of God. The world will answer for its rejection of Christ and so these are great and majestic and noble themes that we see that give us a perspective on the day to day events of news and human events that tend to preoccupy our minds. The things of this day are really of inconsequence compared to what is coming upon the earth when the wrath of God is poured upon it. And so we see this time of judgment, this time of tribulation coming. God, our Lord Jesus Christ, will bring that time, that seven year period to an end when Jesus Christ comes to establish his kingdom. At the end of the tribulation period Jesus Christ will come to establish his kingdom.

Look at Matthew 24, beginning in verse 29 Where Jesus himself said this, he said,

29 ... immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31 And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

You see Christ coming to earth with supernatural signs in the skies. The tribes that are on earth, the wicked people that are there mourning because they see Christ coming in



judgment, Christ at the same time calling together his elect not from the four corners of the earth but from throughout the realm of the heavenlies, calling them together to be with him as he comes to earth and to establish his kingdom.

So we see the rapture, we see the tribulation period and then there is the Second Coming of Christ. He will come to earth in great power and glory. And so our three points here, the rapture, the tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. We get another picture of the coming of Christ, this Second Coming of Christ in Revelation 19 as we turn there for now. Revelation 19 beginning in verse 11. Revelation 19:11,

11 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. 12 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. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Now at the time of this Second Coming as you read on in this section of Revelation, at this time of the Second Coming Christ will bind Satan so that he is no longer able to deceive the nations. Revelation 20. You see the coming of Christ in wrath, the coming of Christ in great glory and what comes after that is this immediately in the context of the Scriptures here, what comes after that is the binding of Satan. Revelation 20:1 through 3,

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 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 we see in this Second Coming, we see Christ coming after a time of tribulation, we see him coming in judgment, in glory and in power and pouring wrath upon the unbelieving earth, and at this same time he binds Satan and restricts him so that he is no longer able to work his deceptive powers upon the nations.

Well, what comes after that, then? Well, you keep reading in the book of Revelation and you see what is coming after that, you see point 4, you see the millennium. The millennium. The millennium is a 1,000 year age in which Jesus Christ reigns on earth and this is described for us in chapter 20, verse 4 of Revelation. He said,

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 and [here it is] reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 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.

And so you go through this passage and you see a 1,000 year period repeatedly being emphasized and it is a period in which the saints reign with Christ for 1,000 years. So Christ has come to earth, the dead in Christ are brought together with him, they are now with Christ on earth and Scripture says twice here that they will reign with him for 1,000 years. Where is Christ? He's on earth. What are the saints doing with him? They are reigning with him. Christ reigning on the earth for 1,000 years.

Now what is the point of that? What does that indicate? Well, we're only going to look at one Old Testament passage but throughout the Old Testament and in the prophets of the Old Testament they promised the nation of Israel, God promised the nation of Israel through his prophets that there would be a future time of blessing for them; that even though they went into exile for a time because of their sin and rebellion, God in his grace would remember the promises that he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when he promised that he would give them a king to be upon the earth. So we see the prophets of the Old Testament repeatedly promising to Israel that there is a coming time in which their king, a son of David, would reign on the earth and we're only going to look at one passage here this morning but I ask you to turn to the book of Ezekiel 37 in the Old Testament. One of the things that is so persuasive to me, perhaps the thing that most compels me toward this view of end times above all other considerations is that when you read the Old Testament prophets, you see them repeatedly speaking in these glowing terms of a future kingdom for Israel that has not yet taken place, and there becomes a point at which you have to understand that in the Old Testament God was promising these things to them. This is preparatory to what we're going to read in Ezekiel. God made promises to his people that he would give this to them, that he would bring this to past and nothing like it has happened in human history since he made those promises. Well, there comes a point where the integrity of God and the very truthfulness of God is at stake. Is he going to keep these promises that he swore to Israel by himself that he would do, that he would keep as a measure of his faithfulness and his love for his chosen people or not? If God just walks away from those promises, then his very integrity and veracity is at stake in what has been said.

So in Ezekiel 37:21 it says this. He says,

21 "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 [a physical location, this is not a spiritual promise here]; 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. 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. 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. 25 They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it [you see, the land, land, the land, this is talking about something that is going to happen on earth], they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. 26 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. 27 My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. 28 And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.'"

And so this is going to be a kingdom that is given to God and the nation Israel will see the descendant of David sitting on his throne, you could say, reigning over them and reigning over the earth in fulfillment of God's promise to his people that he would give them a king that would reign over them in earth and they would serve him in righteousness and keep his commandments and serve him. Well, friends, nothing like that has happened since Ezekiel made this promise some 500 years, 600 years before the time of Christ. Nothing like that has happened here on earth. The nations have not gathered around. The nations have not seen the glory of the Lord.

Look at the book of Habakkuk. We need to look at the book of Habakkuk for just a moment in this context. Habakkuk in your Old Testament and if you can't find it, that's okay, it's a small book and not easily found for those that aren't as familiar with their Bibles. Habakkuk 2:14 it says,

14 ... the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea.

The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. This is something supernatural that will cover the whole realm of the earth and everybody will see it in undeniable manifestation on earth, and the knowledge of the glory of God will be displayed when Christ is reigning like that over his people. And the millennium, this great 1,000 year reign of which Revelation speaks, I believe, our church believes, our

church teaches that the millennium is the fulfillment of that promise of God to his people Israel and it will be a time of glory, it will be a time of righteousness and God will be seen as having kept his promise to his people Israel and having brought in a multitude of Gentiles alongside as well, and the glory of God will be revealed as Christ reigns, it will be a reign of righteousness and peace, and it will be a time when all of the world, all of the earth will see the glory of God and it will be a time where war is banished and peace reigns and everyone is giving glory to Christ, and the promise that God made to Israel that they would have a king over all of the earth would be kept, and that is the purpose of the millennium as Scripture teaches.

But that's not quite yet the end, that's not quite yet the end. After the millennium will come the time of final judgments, point 5 here, final judgments. So we have the rapture, the tribulation period, the Second Coming of Christ, the millennium, and now point 5, final judgments, and for this we're only going to look at Revelation 20 beginning in verse 7. Revelation 20, beginning in verse 7 we see that there is a brief time of rebellion yet to take place, a time that will show that there is still a final work, a final climactic act of God to take place. Revelation 20:7,

7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 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. 9 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. 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.

This judgment will show that nothing that even a thousand year reign of peace, nothing changed the disposition or nature of Satan, that men were still subject to his deception, and so final judgment comes and in verse 11 we see this,

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. 12 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. 13 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.

This is a final resurrection of unbelievers where they are facing their final judgment from God. Verse 14,

14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Last night we looked at what happens when you die, are you a Christian, are you a non-Christian, and this gives a particular accent to what was said last night, a somber accent to it. My non-Christian friend, as we speak about final judgment and whatever else is said about future events, there is no doubt that there is coming a time for unbelievers like you where this terrifying event takes place where God looks on you in your unforgiven sin and judges you and sends you away from him into the lake of fire with the devil, with the beast, with the false prophet, with unbelievers of all time forever and ever, and your destiny is sealed. Your destiny is sealed.

So as we study these things about end times, the way that you need to respond as a non-Christian to this is not to speculate about details that you have a morbid fascination with, you're to understand that this is what is coming upon unbelieving men and to not speculate on matters of future details that the best of Christian theologians disagree over, you need to see the big point, you need to see what ultimately matters for you is the fact that this is what you are on a fast track for if you do not repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, so many times throughout this series we have offered Christ to you, so many times through this Christ has come to you through his word, called you, "Come to Me you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. The one who comes to Me I certainly will not cast out. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." You see, friends, as we look at the reality of future events, we're brought back to the reason why Jesus Christ came in his first advent, in his first coming. He came because he knew the eternal purpose of God and what the plan of God was, that there would be a time of judgment that would come upon all of the world and in mercy he came and gave his life as a ransom for sinners just like you, and now raised from the dead, having accomplished justification for everyone who would believe in him, now he calls you during this day of grace, during this period of time where you are alive, breathing and have the call of the Gospel placed before you and Christ calls you to salvation, now you see more clearly than ever what it is that is being offered for you to be delivered from. This great judgment of God that is certain to come down upon all of humanity is going to be a time of terror and pain and men will be calling upon rocks to fall upon them, Scripture says elsewhere, that they might be hidden from the judgment and they'll call on those rocks to no avail.

So my unbelieving friend, I ask you again, what is going to happen to you in that day? Will you face that day alone? There will be no men to help you, not that men could help you, but every man will be fleeing for himself, running for himself, and you will be left alone in the face of this great righteous wrath of God designed for people just like you as you now are, a rebel against God, a sinner separated from him. And there is a coming day, coming all too quickly, all too soon when God will not be presenting a message of the Gospel of grace to sinners like you, the day of grace will be closed, the door will be slammed shut and what will be left for you is to face the fury of a righteous God against

all of your ungodliness and unrighteousness. Is that what you want? Is that the destiny that you would choose for yourself? Do you see how sweet the Gospel is that comes to you? The promise of forgiveness that is offered in the midst of the echoing, ever increasing rumbles of judgment that are coming upon us? That there is still a word of mercy offered to you, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household"? Friend, I plead with you to heed the word of God, consider the state of your sinful soul and cry out in grateful repentance for Christ to save a sinner just like you. He will. He's still giving you time and in Christ right now there is nothing but willingness to save you. In love he comes and offers the message of the Gospel. In love he promises to snatch you from this horrible fate that is awaiting unbelieving men. Others may disbelieve, that does not need to hinder you. Your friends may mock, your friends may laugh but you can find Christ, you can be saved by believing in him and his death and resurrection as the full payment for all of your sins against a holy God. Jesus said, "I'm the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." So as we bring this whole series to a conclusion, it's come to this laser point focus for you, my unbelieving friend, for whom I pray even as I stand here. I pray for you that the Spirit of God would open your eyes and draw you to Christ and that you would respond in believing repentance to the offer of Christ that comes to you in salvation right now in this great and horrible context in which we see it all.

Well, I can only commend you to the Spirit of God for that now. The rapture, the tribulation, the Second Coming, the millennium, final judgments, and those judgments will prepare the way for the eternal state. Point 6, sixth and final point, the eternal state, and what a blessing this is for us as believers to contemplate. The eternal state for us will be the final removal of the curse of sin. We will enjoy unhindered fellowship with the God of our salvation. We will crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne, and we will be with Christ in a beautiful perfect city of worship.

Look at Revelation 21 as you see the judgments and Satan and unbelievers being cast into hell, that's not the end, here we see now the eternal state which God has prepared. This is what Christ speaks of when he said, "I go and I prepare a place for you, and if I go I'll come again to receive you to Myself so that where I am there you may be also." As we contemplate future events and what happens next, we see the ultimate outcome of the astounding, amazing, astonishing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to those who believe and this is where it all reaches its climax. Revelation 21:1, he says,

1 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. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 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, 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."

Everything that is tinged with sorrow in this life, all of the sin, all of the death, all of the grief, all of the pain, all of that is going to be banished forever as God removes the effects of the curse and brings us into this place of perfection, the holy city, the new Jerusalem. And somehow in a way that, again, I can't fully explain, people ask the question, "Well, what about my unsaved loved ones that aren't with me in heaven? What's that going to be like and I can't imagine being in heaven without them." Well, here you see an answer to that, that somehow God is in perfection going to take away any sense of sorrow over those things and replace it with a sense of the perfection of peace and satisfaction in his goodness to us and we're going to trust him for that and we'll trust him for the outcome of those unbelieving loved ones. Whatever else we know about the future state, the eternal state holds for us, it will not be tinged with any kind of regret over the things that we knew on earth. God is going to wipe away every tear. No pain. No sorrow. No regret. Nothing but the fullest and gladdest of perfection of bliss and joy of being with our Savior forever and ever without end.

In Revelation 22:1, it goes on to say this,

1 ... he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 2 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. 3 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; 4 they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. 5 And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

Look at that wonderful statement in verse 4, they will see his face. They will see his face. I don't know about you but if you strip everything else away from me, that's what I'm living for. I'm living for nothing on this life by comparison to the fulfillment of this promise to God that he makes to all of his saints that we are going to see him face-to-face. We are going to gaze upon the countenance of the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, and not hindered by the veil that separates us now between earth and heaven, not seeing dimly, not seeing, as it were, through a mirror, we are going to see the fullness of Christ, we are going to be in his presence and I don't know exactly what it's going to be like but you and I, my Christian friends, we are going to see the face of the one who saved our souls and we are going to know that we are finally home. We are home with him. We are going to see the fullness of the magnitude of how much he loved us. We are going to see the fullness of the magnitude of the blessings that he had reserved in heaven for us and it is going to be so infinitely far beyond anything that we could ask or think in this life that we will simply be overwhelmed by the glory, the majesty, the grace and the utter perfection and beauty of it all. That's what comes next. That's what lies ahead for us. And somehow, I don't know how this works with untold numbers around the throne, but somehow we are going to have the privilege of seeing our Lord face-to-face and somehow whether this is the exact way that it works out, but the spirit of

it will be in what I'm about to express, we will see his face in majesty and then we will fall at his feet and we will grab his feet, we will grab his feet and we'll say, "Lord, thank You for what you've done for me! Thank You for choosing me! Thank You for saving me at the cross! Thank You for sending the Spirit of God to save me! Thank You for keeping me and thank You for bringing me to this place of glory and bliss! Thank You for Your infinite love on my soul!" And that's what happens next and that is going to be the best thing imaginable, is for us to express unhindered by sin and unhindered by the limitations of human flesh our great love, worship, praise and gratitude to the one who gave himself for our souls. That, my friend, is what we're living for. Nothing compared, nothing in this world compares to the great glory of that eternal reality that will be ours in Christ.

So in light of what happens next, what do we do now? That's what's coming and that's the outcome for every believer in Christ, what do we do now? You know, I always say this when I speak about heaven and seeing Christ face-to-face, whenever we go there mentally in the preaching of the word of God and whenever my mind enters fully into an engagement of that, I don't want to leave that mental realm. I just want to stay there because that's what we're living for, and yet Scripture calls us to bring the future into the way that we live now. We glimpse into the future through the word of God, we see the glory and our hearts are ablaze with anticipation of how majestic that must be when we enter into it, and we reach into it but Scripture calls us back to the understanding that it is to affect the way that we live now.

We've seen what happens next, we could wrap all of this series of by saying, "Okay, well, what happens now? In light of everything that we've seen together in truth, everything that we've seen and what happens next, now we have to come back to today, come back into this moment, as it were, and say what happens now in light of what happens next." Well, turn in your Bible to 2 Peter 3. So much that we could look at, 1 John 3 says, "He who believes these things will purify himself just as he is pure," but for today we're just going to look at 2 Peter 3:13 and 14. 2 Peter 3:13,

13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

That's what we're looking for. That is our hope. That's what we're anticipating. That is the core of our motivation and what sustains us in this life. That's what we're looking for, we're looking for what happens next. But verse 14, "Therefore," here's the conclusion that we are to draw from all of these things,

14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation;

Do you want to be someone who takes end times seriously? Well, where it leads you is not into endless speculations about increasingly remote details about what Scripture says about future events. You see these broad outlines, you look for the new heavens and the



new earth and then you say, "This is going to renew and change the way that I live." What happens now in light of what happens next is this: you and I, we are patient in our trials because we understand that blessing is coming. We're patient in our trials because we understand that blessing is coming. We distinguish ourselves in a time like we are currently living in by showing that we're not going to be all agitated about politics and different kinds of restrictions in life, we're not going to get all worked up and then go out and get all kinds of other people worked up because we're just so concerned about it, about what's going to happen in the next 30 days. Stop. Stop. Stop. Look at what happens next and let the Lord find you living in peace, in contentment, in satisfaction of being under his righteous hand knowing that he has loved our souls, that he is keeping us, and that he is going to deliver us into this blessedness. In light of what happens next, one of the things that we do now is that we live in peace and we are patient in our trials because we understand that blessing is coming.

Along with that, we're not only patient in our trials but we turn from sin because righteousness is coming. When Christ comes, we want to be found living for him. If he came in this moment, we would want to be found by him living blamelessly and not having to suddenly put away our phones or hide the things that we knew we shouldn't be doing and see suddenly the Lord appear. No, we let that flavor for whole way that we approach righteousness. We live in peace. We pursue righteousness in Christ as we anticipate. In light of what happens next, this is what we do now, peaceful living, pursuing our sanctification, trusting Christ for the final outcome, and encouraging each other along the way as we do.

So in light of what happens next, what do we do now? Well, let me just add the biblical punctuation mark to that. Scripture could not be more definitive as it draws to a close as the Canon of Scripture is closed, here's what Scripture said, Revelation 22:20, turn there with me. The next to the last verse of the Bible is a word from Christ and a response from his people. Verse 20,

20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly."

In the whole panoply of the nature of time, it is going to seem as though Christ actually came quickly even though it seems slow from our perspective right now. Christ is saying, "I am coming and I will come quickly. I will come at a time when men don't expect." Jesus as he said in John 14 says at the end of the Bible, "I am coming quickly," to execute all of the things of which we have spoken here today. He's coming.

That's what's happening next and what do you and I do now, then? We respond with a humble prayer, a simple prayer that simply says this, verse 20, look at it there with me,

22 ... Amen. [So be it.] Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus. Having seen everything that Scripture says about this, having secured our salvation through faith in Christ, having trusted him, belonging to him and seeing his word and his will revealed for what comes next, we submit to all of it with the simple

prayer that says, "Yes, Lord, I'm in total submission. I embrace it all, therefore come, Lord Jesus." And then we see this benediction from God upon all of those who adopt that attitude toward what lies ahead. Verse 21, the last verse in the Bible. In a sense we've covered all of the Bible in the series. Verse 21,

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we are not living for this world, we are living for what happens next. Lord Jesus, how we love You now yet we will know a fuller greater love in what happens next when we see You face-to-face and we see the fullness of divine love and the fullness of divine acceptance of us in You. We thank You for coming to earth to save sinners just like us, that in the fullness of the essence of God You delivered us from Satan and You delivered us from our sin, and for now You have brought us into Your church with Your people to gather together for a time. One day our lives will come to an end if You tarry and we will enter into Your immediate presence, our souls will be with You, and eventually this wonderful outworking of Your purposes You will share with us, we will reign with You, but Lord, I have to thank that the climax of it all is going to be when we see Your face and we can whisper or shout the words, "Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You Jesus." May it ever be as we look forward to that day that we are found in peace, living blamelessly, looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus. You're coming quickly to which we respond, "Yes, come Lord Jesus." Amen.*

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