

The Soon Coming End – Part 4

2 Peter 3:1-13

⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 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. (2 Peter 3:9-15 (NASB))

As we continue with our study about the soon coming “Day of the Lord”, that day when God will call the days of humanity on this earth to a close, and as we consider such things as in verse 10, that

¹⁰ . . . the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (2nd Peter 3:10)

May we first and always keep our eyes and our thoughts on the author and the keeper of all these mysteries, the Lord Jesus, because He is the One that this story is really all about. I remind us of that because too often, and especially in times of impending peril, our hearts and our minds get very self-absorbed, and we believe that everything is about us. But it is not! These words in Romans 11 tell us simply that,

³⁶ For from him (that is the Lord Jesus) for from Him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36 (ESV))

This Book and our existence on this earth are ever and always all about God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and about a “plan”, a “plan” that He put into place eons ago to bring “glory” to Himself, a plan that yes, does include all of us in His creation, the sons of men, and all the other created things in these visible realms, and it also includes all those other creatures that are among us, creatures that live in the unseen invisible realms, the angels and demons. But again, this “plan” was just for one purpose, to bring glory to God.

And this bible is the revelation of that “great plan”. And as you and I dare to read and to believe these words in this book, we find that God really has revealed to us most everything that we will need to know about as these days draw to a close.

For those of us who read and believe these words, we are able to see that contrary to the inventive stories of man, our world, the heavens, the earth, and all of the inhabitants of this earth clearly had a very distinct beginning. But then also, these same words tell us, with a certainty, that after a “God-ordained number of days of existence, there will also be a clear and distinct end to it all.

And these words reveal to us that that end is now probably coming a lot sooner than most people think. But unfortunately, our minds resist such thoughts. We seem to not want to listen to, or if we are reading, to just “read right on past” warning about coming difficult things. Recall in the gospels how the disciples seemed not to hear when Jesus would talk to them about His soon coming death.

And as Jesus said, in Matthew 24 regarding this soon coming end,

³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:37-42 (ESV))

Here, Jesus is speaking about the soon coming rapture. Listen again to these words in 1 Thessalonians 4

¹⁶ . . . the Lord (Jesus) himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV))

In that moment when the rapture takes place,

⁴⁰ . . . two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:40-42 (ESV))

And oh my, there will be such surprise and anxiety and great fear, because as we read here in our passage, many have been “scoffing” and “mocking” whenever the “end of the age” has been talked about. And sadly, too often, even many of us who count ourselves as devout believers have scoffed. And we also will probably be surprised as we are being raptured away to be with Jesus.

And listen, Jesus really does not want you and me to be surprised at His coming! He wants you and me who believe in Him to be ever alert and looking forward, with anticipation, to His coming.

And may I pause and say again, for those of us who will be caught away to be with the Lord Jesus in the heavens, what a day of rejoicing that will be. Imagine that moment! All of us who have Christ as our Savior will suddenly be together with Christ and with each other in the most pleasant place imaginable, in Paradise. And folks, God has given us the word “Paradise” to excite our imagination about heaven, the glory and the perfectly pleasant conditions that we will suddenly be in, no more suffering, no more anxieties, no more fears, no more turmoil, no more uncertainty, just perfect peace and happiness.

And oh, also the joys we will experience as we see our loved ones who have gone on before us. Who are your most cherished loved ones? Those who knew the Lord Jesus will be there with us rejoicing at our arrival. What a blessed reunion that will be!

But for today, let’s return our thoughts back to these scriptures that we are studying. Over these past few weeks, we have talked about the events that will lead up to that moment when we will suddenly be caught up to be with the Lord Jesus in the heavens. And as we studied last week, there are a lot of circumstances and events that will take place leading up to that moment, some of which have been in the making for thousands of years.

And those circumstances and events are not just the ones that are taking place here on the earth, in this visible realm. There is also much taking place in that other realm, the invisible realm where angels and demons roam to and fro, interacting with you and me up on the surface in the visible realms, taking an active part in most all of the things that we do each day, while all the while remaining still unseen by us.

And a reminder, it is in that realm that the risen Lord Jesus now lives and reigns, controlling all that takes place in every realm of existence. And it will be from those heavenly realms, that the Lord Jesus will bring the final events of life on this earth to a conclusion. And it seems from these scriptures that central to the timing of when He will

call these days to a close are specific signs and events involving His two chosen families, His family the Jews, and also His special adopted family, us Gentiles.

And we being Gentiles should be especially concerned about what His plan is for us. And He has given us some specific revelations. But if we are to adequately comprehend His plan, we need to be clear minded and attentive, else we'll not recognize what He is telling us. One revelation has to do with what God calls the "fullness of the Gentiles". Listen to these words in Romans 11:25,

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness (or full number) of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. (Romans 11:25 (ESV))

These are mysterious words, but they are one of the clear signs that has been given to us regarding the end of the age. And these words seem to specifically address the timing of when the rapture will take place.

As these words tell us, a "partial hardening" of Israel took place when Jesus came and began to minister among His people, the Jews. But they rejected Him. Romans 11 again,

⁸ as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." (Romans 11:8 (ESV))

Thankfully, the hardening of the Jewish hearts was not complete or permanent. At some point, God will restore them to His family. But from that moment and for the time being, their hearts have been hardened towards the Lord Jesus. And it was with that hardening of the Jews that God then opened up His family to begin to include us Gentiles. And from those days forward, we Gentiles have been daily being added to the kingdom.

But then, according to these words, mysteriously, that open door will one day suddenly close. A "fullness of the Gentiles", a "full number" of those that God had chosen will have come into His kingdom, and that is when the rapture will take place. And as we are raptured off the earth, that will then signal a reopening of the door for the Jews to be drawn back into God's kingdom.

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Those words, "all Israel will be saved", does that mean that every Jew who has ever lived will be saved? Most likely not. But at least 144,000 of them will be drawn in.

The Book of Revelations is a very special and very mysterious book of the bible, understood by few, especially me, but all the same very revealing about those things that will take place on the earth during the final “last days” of the earth, and especially during those terrible days of the “Great Tribulation”. In chapter 7 of Revelations, God speaks directly about His plan to save His Jewish children and draw them back into His kingdom.

I'd like to read that portion to us, please do turn there. But before I read these words, may I remind us again that there is so much, much taking place in both of these realms of existence, the visible realm where we live, and also in the invisible realms. Listen to the description that John gives to these events, and again note that these events involve both realms of existence. He tells us,

¹ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³ saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ⁵ 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” ¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” ¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve

him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:1-17 (ESV))

In an earlier message, I mentioned that there was a very good reason for those terrible days of the “Great Tribulation”, and it is this. After the rapture takes all the believers off the earth, God will provide one more opportunity to those who have rejected Him. That assurance in the words of our text, verse 9

⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

And verse 15

¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. (2 Peter 3:9, 15)

This is our ever-patient and loving God, not wishing that any would perish, but would come to repentance. Unfortunately, for those who have rejected Christ during these days and are left behind after the rapture, that repentance and their salvation will come at the severest of prices, suffering beyond anything they could ever imagine. But as you can see from the description of those who come into the kingdom, “a great multitude that no one can number”, there will be many who turn their hearts to Christ during those terrible suffering days of the “Great Tribulation”. So, praise the Lord for His enduring love and mercy!

We’ll need to close for now. I hope to continue on further next week. Until then, think on these words in Matthew 24,

⁴⁰ . . . two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
(Matthew 24:40-42 (ESV))