

The Soon Coming End – Part 6

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))

Over the recent weeks, as we have studied about the events of what the Apostle Peter here in verse 3 calls “the last days”, our study has helped us to understand that “all” of time, whether it be the beginning of time, or during the days of these scriptures, or these current days that we live in, or the end of time, is all being determined and carried forward within a predesigned plan of God. Every step, every event, every behavior of men, everything that has taken place and everything that will take place yet to come, is all in accordance with a very specific “plan” that God has made.

How do we know that to be so? By simply reading these scriptures. Here, hundreds, even thousands of years before events were to take place, God, speaking through His prophets plainly and clearly prophesied about the things to come. And those things have taken place, exactly as God prophesied they would.

And God clearly did not just “see ahead” the things that were going to take place. Our understanding of God’s omnipresence, and His omnipotence, and His omniscience is that He is able to “see” all things, in all of time, all at the same time. He doesn’t have to “wait” or “look ahead” to see what we might do at some later date.

And neither did God, in some “hands-off” manner, simply “allow” those things and events to “happen”. He clearly had His almighty Hand inserted into everything that took place, guiding and directing every step toward His predetermined end.

And yes, clearly, men and women do exercise their freewill in all that takes place. Even now, during these very days we are living in, we can see man’s freewill falling into place

just as God prophesied it would during the “last days”. Listen to these words in 2 Timothy.

¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. (2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV))

Do these behaviors not perfectly describe, with great detail and accuracy many, many of the people in the culture of our day!

And yes, as these words plainly show us, man’s “free will” is ever and always at work in all that is taking place. But part of the mysterious nature and sovereign power of God is that man’s freewill is never completely independent of God’s Will. Man’s free will and God’s sovereign Will are often so closely intertwined that we are unable to discern which is taking place at any one moment.

May I say this again. God’s “sovereign will” is always so powerfully at work, that even during those moments when the intentional “freewill” actions and behaviors of men are being freely exercised, God’s “sovereign will” is still ever and always governing everything that is taking place. It is as simple as the words of Proverbs 16,

⁹ The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.
(Proverbs 16:9 (NASB))

And so it will be also involving the events and the behaviors of men in the “last days”, men and women will do what they do, both good things and evil things, but God will direct all those many behaviors and events towards a conclusion of His choice, as He brings about the closing act of this “great drama” of mankind.

Again, how do we know that to be so? The simple answer is, we have the “script” right in front of us, given here in great detail in these scriptures, in the Book of Revelation, and in the Books of Daniel and Ezekiel and Joel and many others.

A question . . . why can’t the average person simply read these words and relate them to everything that is taking place? The answer is, these mysteries of God and their meanings were never intended for those outside the “family of God”, nor for even the most learned of secular scholars to understand and comprehend. As we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 2,

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV))

The secret mysteries of God that are given within these scriptures can only be discerned by the “Spirit of God”, as He dwells within us. It is only in and through His presence within us that our minds are able to receive and to comprehend truths like these, truths that we never knew before. It is just as Jesus explained to His disciples when giving the “Parable of the Soils”, these truths are intended to be understood only by His disciples, those who love Him and follow Him, and not by other people.

That is why we are here in this church today, stirred by the things we are reading. God’s Spirit is revealing these prophecies to us about the “soon coming end” so that we will not be caught by surprise, and so that we can be prepared as His plan unfolds each day.

Please turn with me to the Book of Revelation, because today, I would like for us to begin to venture through some of the beginning words and prophecies given there, words that reveal the unchangeable “script” that God has written out for the “final act” of this “Great Drama” of mankind that is coming to a close. And again, please do understand that God does not just “know about” these coming events, and He doesn’t just “allow” these things to happen. His “Hand” is ever and always intimately involved as the “first cause” of each and every thing that takes place.

May we turn first to chapter 1. And while we’ll not read much from the first three chapters, I would like to give us a short summary of them, because their words put into place part of the foundation for our understanding of all the next things that we will read.

Here in these three chapters, we are told plainly that the words of this Book come directly from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. Yes, some of them are delivered through angels, but they are still directly from Him. He is ever and always the “Word” of God and these are an expression of Him and the things He intends to do during the “soon coming end” of the earth. And this Book is ultimately about Him, the Lord Jesus, and His return to reclaim His purchased possession from the sinful conditions that the world has descended into.

And here in these first three chapters, much on the same order that Jacob did as he called his sons to him just before he died, saying to them, “Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days. (Genesis 49:1) Here, Jesus begins this Book of Revelation by calling His “sons” together for some final words, writing some

final “letters” to His “church”, here, His church being in the form of seven congregations that existed during the days of the Apostle John, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, but these letters also having the intent that the same message be addressed to all the many future church congregations throughout the generations to come, even to our day, to this church, with some churches having been faithful to God, but others that have not.

And in these letters, Jesus gives stern warnings to some of the churches, for them to turn back from their descent into apostasy and into sinful behavior, the church of Ephesus having “left its first love”, and Thyatira who condones, even promotes immorality, and on and on. Sadly, such is the course that many of our modern-day churches have followed, many of them having had excellent beginnings, only to later on “leave their first love, the Lord Jesus” and descend into the same conditions described here in 2 Timothy 3,

⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.
(2 Timothy 3:5 (ESV))

Thankfully, these letters are not just words of condemnation. Jesus concludes them with an encouraging promise saying,

²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Revelation 3:21 (NKJV))

Again, these letters to these churches set the stage for all of the next things that God intends to do as He calls the days of this earth to a close. The assumption we reach from reading these letter is that there will come a time when the church on the earth will have reached a completion of its calling, a “fullness of days”. It is then that God will call everything to a close, beginning with the most devastating event in the history of mankind, the “rapture”.

And it has been clearly noted by bible scholars that after the end of chapter 3 of this Book of Revelations, there is no further mention of the church throughout the rest of the Book. So then, after these final warnings given in these first three chapters, that is when the “rapture” of the church will take place. Those wonderful words again from 1 Thessalonians 4

¹⁶ . . . the Lord 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))

And though you know well what the “rapture” is all about, may I still remind us again that the rapture is that glorious moment in time when all of the Christian believers are suddenly caught up into the heavens to be with Jesus forever and ever, Jesus describing that moment in Matthew 24 with the words,

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 no, we will not know the exactly moment when the rapture is going to take place, and exactly which events will take place that lead up to that moment. Many people have speculated, and I along with them. But we do know that there will be many “signs” of the soon coming end well preceding the moment of the rapture. We have read about those in earlier messages. In Matthew 24 we read,

⁶ . . . you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these *are* the beginning of sorrows. ⁹ Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. ¹¹ Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ¹² And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But he who endures to the end shall be saved.
(Matthew 24:6-13 (NKJV))

One of the difficult things for the bible scholars to determine is just how much of these sufferings will take place before the rapture and how much will take place afterwards. Certainly, some part of the tribulation will take place before the rapture. It already seems to be taking place now, especially in the countries of the Middle-East. Christians in Syria and Iraq are being especially targeted by ISIS for slaughter.

And the false prophets spoken about in Matthew 24, verse 11,

¹¹ Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.
(Matthew 24:11 (NKJV))

They are already among us, having free reign within our churches here in America, preaching heresy to weak-willed and unstable listeners.

Again, by God's own design, it will not be known when the rapture will take place. And it does seem that there will a considerable amount of suffering for believers, months, perhaps years, before we are raptured out of the tribulation.

And it will be during those days that certain world leaders will begin to emerge, those that will later be seen to have been taken over by strong demons. And those world leaders will form alliances between them and they will deceive many into joining in with their schemes.

Even today, in our nightly news programs, we are clearly able to see those very kinds of alliances being formed all over the Middle-East, Russia establishing military bases in Syria, the recent Iran nuclear treaty, cleverly preparing for a soon coming persecution of all who would oppose them, especially Christian believers.

But it is worthy to remember that these troubles that involve Christian believers, will always be at the hands of men and not by the hand God. God's wrath that is spoken about in these scriptures is reserved only for the unbelievers, those who have intentionally rejected Christ as Lord.

But then, after a predetermined time, and before the "Great Tribulation" wrath of God begins to fall upon the people of the earth, Jesus will suddenly rapture the believers off the earth to be with Him. Praise be to God!

And we find as we look into chapter 4, that while all of these things are taking place here on the earth, the rise of world leaders and the mistreatment of believers, many, many things are also taking place in the heavens. There in chapter 4, God opens up the doors of heaven and allows us to see into the many things that will be taking place in heaven immediately following the rapture. There John tells us about things that no one has been allowed to see before, God on His throne with all the many angels and living creatures and raptured saints gathered around Him.

And there within this heavenly scene, God reveals that it is time to begin the final stage of His plan for this earth and the people on it. And it begins there with a great "scroll" that needs to be opened, a "scroll" that has seven seals within it, each seal cloaking events that are to take place, most of them horribly painful events, events that will eventually lead to eternal judgment being carried out over all the earth.

And there arises a resounding cry throughout the heavens, crying, crying, "who is worthy to open the seals of the scroll" and begin to declare judgment upon the earth, with the answer finally coming forth that it is Jesus and Jesus alone who is worthy to

open the scroll and to begin the final judgment. Why is He and He alone worthy? It is because He alone paid the price in His blood to purchase the redeemed from the earth.

I must stop here for today. The Lord willing, we will continue next week. May we close with these words, from chapter 5, verses 9-12,

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You (Lord Jesus) to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:9-12 (ESV))