

The Soon Coming End – Part 9

2 Peter 3:9-13

Revelation 13:7-13

⁷ It was granted to him (the beast) to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. ⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰ He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. (Revelation 13:7-10 (NKJV))

We have been away from this series of messages for two weeks now. So, may I catch us back up with some reminders. As we concluded a message a few weeks back, we sang the song, “I Wish We Had All Been Ready”, the words of the song foretelling the awful suffering that will become rampant all over the earth during those awful coming days of the “Great Tribulation”. With all of the Christians having been raptured off the earth and many, many people giving themselves over to take the “mark of the beast”, unrestrained evil will become commonplace everywhere, on every street, and even in people’s homes. And with all of the Christians having been raptured away, even the simplest forms and expressions of caring, of love, of pity and compassion that people had been accustomed to receiving from one another will all be gone. Those words in the song again,

Life was filled with guns and war
And everyone got trampled on the floor
I wish we'd all been ready,

Children died the days grew cold
A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold
I wish we'd all been ready

Those will truly be days of tribulation, chaos and fear will be commonplace. And with few to really care, children and weak ones really will get trampled without anyone to help. And as food and clothing shortages get really bad, and no way to keep warm on those cold winter nights, what will people do? It will be such a sad time for those who have been left behind, because there will be no hope of conditions getting any better. Never again will there be a kind and gentle world.

But with that sad reality being true, we do also know that God’s heart is ever and always loving, and always generous, especially to those who will turn and surrender their hearts

to Him. For them, I am certain that during those worst days of seeming hopelessness, God will shine His precious light of hope into their hearts. And He will surely bring comfort and relief, even if at some point, that relief needs be death; because yes, death is actually a sweet and merciful relief for those who have salvation. Death is just one short breath away from stepping into God's blessed and safe presence where peace and comfort abide forever.

And because God is merciful and does not desire that any should perish, right up even to the very last moment of the very "last day", He will continue to draw more and more people into His kingdom.

Here in chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation, we read where a very special group of God's chosen people will be brought in to His kingdom during the tribulation, 144,000 of His blessed chosen family Israel. Turn with me to Revelation chapter 7, and follow along as I read.

¹ After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed. (Revelation 7:1-4 (NKJV))

And note in the verses that follow how specific the Lord is about who these 144,000 Jews are, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes.

And then in chapter 14, beginning in verse 1 we read,

1 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, 3 and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. 4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. (Revelation 14:1-5 (ESV))

Again, these 144,000 Jews will be specifically chosen by God, hand-picked by Him, and will have a very special calling and responsibility to carry out during some of the worst days of the tribulation. One bible commentator words it this way.

“These particular Jews are “sealed,” which means they have the special protection of God from all of the divine judgments and from the Antichrist, enabling them to perform their mission of evangelizing and proclaiming the gospel during the tribulation. As a result of their ministry, millions, “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” will come to faith in Christ.”

Those words in verse 9 of chapter 7,

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10 (NKJV))

May I remind us that the events of the “last days”, and especially those things that will take place after the rapture, will be so very different from anything we have ever known before, mystical things, things unknowable to the human mind will be taking place. And these are some of those things. As these 144,000 go about evangelizing great numbers of people, they will be fully protected from being harmed, both from the wrath of God that will be falling all around them and upon the unbelievers, and also protected from the forces of the antichrist, until their mission is complete.

And there is another mysterious, profound ministry that will also take place during those days of the tribulation, this time by two special “witnesses”. Turn with me to Revelation chapter 11 and follow along as I read . . .

3 And I (God) will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. 6 They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. 7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, 8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was

crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, 10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. (Revelation 11:3-12 (ESV))

The bible commentator, John MacArthur tells us that

"The word "prophecy" in the New Testament is often misunderstood. It does not necessarily refer to predicting the future. Its primary meaning is "to speak forth," "to proclaim," or "to preach." These two witnesses will proclaim to the world that the disasters occurring during the last half of the Tribulation, twelve hundred and sixty days, are the judgments of God. They will warn that God's final outpouring of judgment and eternal hell will follow. At the same time, they will preach the gospel, calling people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

I must confess that I marvel at these things . . . the power and the protection given to these two witnesses. But why should I marvel so, when I know that our God is Almighty and He will display His power in mightier ways than these.

And yes, besides the 144,000 and these two witnesses ministering and evangelizing, God will surely also provide many, many other ministers to preach and to bring help and comfort, especially to the believers, as the forces of the antichrist hunt them down, and try to kill many of them.

Again, may I remind us that while the suffering will be great for all those who turn their hearts to Christ during the tribulation, it is still "precious grace", God not desiring that any should perish. And surely many, many of these will be among the number who are spoken about in Revelation 7.

⁹After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10 (NKJV))

There is much speculation among the bible commentators about what will eventually take place with all the many new converts that become saved during the tribulation,

because the scriptures are clear that none of them will have to suffer the final “wrath of God” that will take place and consume the earth in the last 3 ½ years of the tribulation. God’s “wrath” is reserved only for the unbelievers.

Some would like to believe that just before those “seals” of the “scroll” are opened, especially the seventh seal, and before the many “bowls” of wrath begin to pour out upon the earth, Christ will bring about another ingathering of believers, similar to that of the rapture. We aren’t told exactly what will take place . . . but, I have wondered what God’s words in Revelation 14 foretells for us. Turn there with me and let’s read!

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” 16 So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. (Revelation 14:14-16 (ESV))

Could these words foretell the moment when all the remaining Christians, the 144,000 and all the others who have turned to Christ during the tribulation time, will suddenly be taken off the earth to be with Him in heaven? I would like to think so, because the very next verses speak of a similar reaping, but this time of those who will be required to suffer God’s wrath. Listen!

¹⁷ And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.” ¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered *the clusters from* the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. ²⁰ And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles. (Revelation 14:17-20 (NASB))

It is so very difficult for our human minds to comprehend such mysterious and spiritually heavy matters as these, God carrying out the final redemption of His saints and then His final retribution toward those who have rejected Him. But all of this will surely take place.

It is my prayer that all who hear these words will turn their hearts fully to Christ, else this might be their final outcome. Folks yes, God is good. He is truly “good and He doeth good”. But as we have said over and over again from this pulpit, God’s definition of “good” does not fit the definition of “good” that most people want it to be. God really is

not just some “good old grandfatherly” type guy who will figure out a way to get everyone into heaven, whether they have trusted in Him or not. These words that I have just read to us are only a few of the many scriptures that tell a very different story. The real truth is, God is “holy” and He is “just”, and He will require justice of all men and women. As these scriptures that I just read clearly tell us, some people will repent and stand before His throne and praise and worship Him, but others, many, many others, those who would not turn their “whole hearts” to Him, they will be thrown into the “winepress of His wrath”, enduring endless suffering beyond anyone’s imagination. And it will take place on a scale that we could never imagine. As we just read in verse 20 of Revelation 14,

²⁰ And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.
(Revelation 14:20 (NASB))

Oh, dear friends, this is suffering and death on a scale that we can't imagine. And none of us dare risk being left behind at the rapture. If we are, this will be our fate.

We'll need to close for today, but the Lord willing, we'll pick back up here next week.
Listen!

15 Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:1-17 (NASB))