

The Soon Coming End – Part 2

2 Peter 3:1-13

¹ This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken* by your apostles. ³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." ⁵ For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, ⁶ through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. ⁷ But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 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.

(2 Peter 3:1-13 (NASB))

Today, as we continue to consider the “end of the days” of the earth that is being warned about here in this passage, I confess to you that these matters and events spoken about here, and also in other similar passages in these scripture, are of great interest and concern to me personally.

I’ve said to you on other occasions that from those earliest days of my belief in Christ, “eschatology”, the study about the “end times”, has been a big part of my Christian experience. And so that we will all be on the same page as to what “eschatology” means, let me give us a short definition from one bible dictionary regarding its’ meaning? We are told there that, “Eschatology is the study of the teachings in the bible concerning the end times, that period of time when Christ returns and the events that then follow His return.

Teachings on eschatology include the Resurrection, the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Millennium, the Binding of Satan, the Final Judgment, Armageddon, and The New Heavens and the New Earth.

And the teachings on eschatology can be found all throughout the Old and the New Testaments, but especially in the Books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, 2 Thessalonians, 2nd Peter, and in Revelation.”

If you find that you have an intense interest in these things as I do, I encourage you to search through those Books of the Bible and see for yourself the reality of the soon coming return of Christ spoken about here in our text.

My story is that when I was a new Christian, right from the beginning, I was on fire for the Lord, studying my bible and reading lots of books about God. And it was during those days that a Christian friend gave me a copy of the book “The Late Great Planet Earth” by Hal Lindsay. And I confess that I chewed long and hard on Hal Lindsay’s version of how the “end times” would “play out” in our human history.

In that book and other similar books, I read over and over again about what those authors thought would take place as the “tribulation” began to build in intensity and unfold upon the earth; and about how after the “rapture” took place, the devastating “wrath of God” would be poured out upon the remaining people of the earth.

Now, may I remind us that there are several versions of what the eschatologists tell us will actually take place in those days. For the most part, they are all earnest believers and want to be accurate, but it is obvious that each of them let’s their imaginations get involved in their predictions. And because of that, we have a varied story being presented to us. At the top of the list would be favorites like the “Left Behind” series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. And so, the warning must be that while you might accept many of the things these writers tell you, be careful to only place real trust in the words of scripture.

With all of that being said, as I have read these accounts by these many authors about those coming days, I most often find a general line of reasoning that is acceptable when compared to the scriptures.

Some of the biggest variations in the accounts being presented to us is in the “time line” of when each of the events given in the scriptures will take place, especially the more catastrophic events. So as I give you my understanding of what will take place during

these soon coming days, may I ask you to consider that God has not, as yet, given me a firm understanding of some of those things and events.

As I understand the timing of the Lord's return to be, we who have God's Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds will begin to "discern the times" and begin to "discern the signs" of those soon coming days, signs clearly given in these scriptures. Some that we read about last week from Matthew 24. Follow along with me again as I read. Verse 4,

4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you.

5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.

6 "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, but *that* is not yet the end.

7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various

places there will be famines and earthquakes.

8 "But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs.

9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

10 "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

11 "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.

12 "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

13 "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end

will come. (Matthew 24:4-14 (NASB))

As we begin to see these signs mentioned here taking place, and I do believe they are already taking place this very day, and as the intensity mounts in the mistreatment of Christian believers, then in the very special timing of God's plan, there will be a sudden event take place that will devastate the entire world. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all the believers on the earth, both those who are alive at that moment and all those who have before times died, will suddenly be "caught up", "raptured" away into the clouds to be with Christ. Let me read those words for us again in 1 Thessalonians 4,

¹⁶ For 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))

A question . . . Why does God "rapture" us believers away from the earth? It is because He is getting ready to pour out His violent "wrath" upon the earth and upon all the people that remain here. And His "wrath" is not intended for us believers, but only for

unbelievers, those who have, time and time again, rejected His provision of salvation. He tells us that in 1 Thessalonians 5,

⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 (ESV))

Once we believers are taken off the earth and only the unbelievers are left to remain upon it, that is when the “great tribulation” will begin to unfold in earnest. All the miseries that we just read about in Matthew 24 will intensify to a most awful degree. Satan will apparently be unleashed to begin to inflict, with intensity, suffering like mankind has never known before.

And this is where the fiction and non-fiction writers of our day have worked some of their best and some of their worst imaginary scenarios of misery. And an important thing to keep in mind is that after all of the Christians are raptured off the earth, there will be no one left who has the goodness of the Holy Spirit in them. There is no form of love, no compassion, no caring of any kind remaining on the earth, only self-centered behaviors of every kind. That is when those things spoken about in Matthew 24 will get really awful, friend against friend, family member against family member. In those days, mankind will truly begin to experience lawless days, the “survival of the fittest”. And the weak will surely be devoured by the strong.

In those days, satan will begin to demand that all people yield their allegiance to him and to actually worship him as god. And he will institute an economic system without money that will involve a number being imprinted upon people’s foreheads and hands. And without it no one can buy or sell or receive the necessities of life. Listen carefully to these words in Revelations 13,

¹¹ Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. ¹² He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. ¹³ He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. ¹⁴ And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who *had the wound of the sword and has come to life. ¹⁵ And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶ And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, ¹⁷ and *he*

provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name. ¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.
(Revelation 13:11-18 (NASB))

Folks, this is not fiction. This is not just something that a human writer has conjured up in his mind about what will take place in the end times, this is the unchangeable, inerrant, infallible, truth of God. And He is warning us that there will surely come a day of distress like mankind has never known before and will never know again.

This is real and we had better deal with its reality now, today. If we do not have Christ as our Savior right at this moment, we are standing on the shakiest ground we could ever imagine. If we do not have Christ as our Savior, and the rapture were to take place in the next moment, we truly would be “left behind”. And if we are “left behind” we absolutely will suffer these sufferings that are spoken about here.

A question, why did God insert this awful time of the tribulation into His plan for mankind? Why did He not just rapture us out and immediately destroy the remaining people with His “fire and brimstone” rained down from the sky? He told us why here in 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.
(2nd Peter 3:9)

God is a gracious God of “second chances” right up until the very end. He has opened the door now, during our day, and it stands wide open for us to walk in. Not only that, He is actually pursuing us, drawing us, knocking on the doors of our hearts, pleading with us to come to Him. If we do that now, we will joyfully be in that crowd that is raptured out to be with Him.

But if you refuse to receive Him as your Savior and Lord, and you are still alive when the “rapture” takes place and are “left behind”, then He will actually provide you with one last chance. That is one of the reasons for the tribulation. During those days, many who had before rejected Him will realize the utter foolishness of their decision and will turn their hearts to him and be saved. But oh, please, please do understand, the price that they will have to pay for that “second chance” will be suffering beyond all comprehension.

And please understand, those who reject Christ now and will be required to go through the worst of the tribulation are not just the real “bad guys” among us, the thugs, the drug dealer, the murders, rapists and pedophiles. No, it will be some of our dearest loved ones, our children and grandchildren, our most beloved family and friends. They may not be so “really bad”, but if they have, during this lifetime, rejected Christ, they will surely pay the worst price imaginable. Think about that!

I must close for now, but please, may I ask again. Are you sure that if the rapture took place tonight, that you would be taken to be with Christ in the clouds, or will you be “left behind”.

Listen to this verse, one often given by Billy Graham in his altar calls . . .

¹ We then, as workers together *with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For He says: "*In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.*" Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (NKJV))