

Christ's Kingdom Forecast-Part 4
The Unprecedented Turmoil
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Well I had a pithy headline catch my attention this week while I was reading, it simply said "California's Other Drought." And I thought for a second it might be an article about the dearth of biblical exposition in California, a la Amos Chapter 8. But then I realized it was written by a professor of geophysics and I thought, well, it's not about preaching, I guess. And the subtitle made it very clear when I finally got to reading the whole thing, it said a major earthquake is overdue. Well that was a scary headline being in California. I thought, wow, OK, we got a drought of earthquakes. Well, the lead sentence in the article didn't relieve any of your anxiety. Here's the lead sentence, "California earthquakes are a geologic inevitability." They are inevitable, California earthquakes, and we're long overdue, we haven't had one for a while, not the big one. Well, halfway through this fairly lengthy article that I was reading I started to conjure up images of people who, frankly, I see on a surprisingly popular television show on National Geographic Channel called Doomsday Preppers. Have you've seen this show? It will make you feel really normal if you see the show. Wow. And as I read the article I recognized, OK, I guess that's not where he's trying to get us to do, he's not trying to make us wear helmets to work or carry gas masks around in our car. He just wants to tell us that, you know, tectonic plates are going to move and you guys live right on a big seam here and you got some active fault lines all the way up and down your state, and we're due a big earthquake. It is a scientific reality. This is coming, it's a geologic inevitability.

Now, he's not trying to get us to panic, he's trying to get us to make some reasonable preparations for it. Well, this article was about a geophysicist trying to get us complacent Californians to kind of wake up to some realities. And I suppose that's helpful. But the creator of physics would like to wake us up, not a complacent people, to the reality of something that we find in our passage today that we're studying, as we continue through Luke, Luke Chapter 21 beginning in verse 25, an inevitability that might, if he were to write an article today for us in the Atlantic or any other journal, he might say this: he'd say, the end of the world is a theological inevitability. Theologically this is going to happen. And if you think about that long enough you start to say, "Well, I've read some of those books on end times and eschatology, I start to picture a different kind of doomsday prepper, this prophecy nut, this person who is so freaked out about the end of the world and they're cutting headlines out of newspapers and pinning them up in their bedroom and, you know, these are crazy apocalyptic dooms-dayers and, you know, they've got a sandwich board that says, "The end is near" in their closet and they, you know, are tempted to ring bells down the street as they tell people to turn or burn. That may be an image that you think about when you think of people who really focus on what this passage that we're about to read is all about.

But you can't deny that forecast. And if you believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, what he's telling us here is certainly true. And when he speaks of this, he certainly is the, probably, the leading prophetic voice in the New Testament regarding the things to come and the forecast, as we see in our series title, is ultimately about the kingdom, but between here and the kingdom it's really bleak. We've talked about that in the second installment of our series as we've gone through this passage, but we get to a place now where it gets very concentrated in terms of a very dark forecast that one that really spells the end of the world as we know it.

So there is a bright and cheery subject for you on a Sunday morning in south Orange County. Welcome to church. Let's read the passage, Luke Chapter 21. Turn to it, if you haven't already, call it up on your device. Look at this, verses 25 through 28. Jesus giving us a very sobering picture of

what is theologically inevitable. Verse 25. "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near."

Well it ends on a positive note there in verse 28, but there are some pretty dark and negative things, to use the word that we found in the text, is a foreboding forecast about what's coming, not just on Israel. We're no longer, in any way, I think, convinced that this is about 70 A.D. and some surrounding cities from Titus' Roman army that's going to take down the city. Now we're into cosmic scenes of sun and moon and stars and we've got perplexity in the nations. We're not talking about two nations, Rome and Israel, we're talking, it says there, of fainting and fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world. This is a universal problem. I think this forecast ought to remind us, if anything else, that the world as we know it isn't going to be here for long. It's a temporary reality and let me be pastoral for a little bit as we start our sermon, number one on your outline, if you're taking notes, just looking at verses 25 and 26, the forecast is it's going to come to an end in a big and dramatic way, the end of this age, where God does something in this world that is really horrific in many ways.

Therefore, the world that you live in now, let's put it this way, you need to "Live Like this World is Temporary," because it is temporary and it is going away. The world as you know it and everything about it, all of its values, all the things it praises, all the things that it loves, all the things that it is enamored with, all the things that we know are not acceptable to God nor are they pleasing to God, those things, in this society, in this world, it will come to an end. It will not come to an end in a joyful way, a happy way. It won't just fizzle out or burn out. It's going to come to an abrupt end. History is linear and it's moving toward an end and this age will end with something that is horrible. Matter of fact, as I told you earlier in this series, in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, we have the parallel account of this which gives us more information than what we have in Luke 21 of the same situation where Jesus comes out from the Temple Mount, stands here or sits here on the Mount of Olives and gives what we know of as the Olivet Discourse talking about these things. In that expanded discussion, Matthew and Mark include in them something about this horrific time when we got sun and moon and stars and all these things going on all over the world. Here's what Jesus adds to make this clear. This is not just a bad season of time in history, it is the worst season. I'll quote it for you, Matthew Chapter 24 verse 21. Same context, same discussion, same scene. It's just a little bit more of the verbiage that Jesus used. It says this, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." This is the worst that's ever been. He's speaking here in the first century A.D. and never will be.

Now there's been some really, really bad times before Christ sat there and said these things on the Mount of Olives. And you and I know, looking back 2,000 years later, there have been some really, really bad times of tribulation since that time that Jesus said that. But Jesus is talking about a time, with these cataclysmic signs that are so bad, he says, it's the worst tribulation that has ever been in the history of the world and it's the worst tribulation that ever will be. This is not "a" tribulation. This is great tribulation. I'll tell you why. Because it is not the vengeance of a Roman army. It is not about the Babylonians or the Persians, it's not about any kind of enemy going back to the Assyrians or the Egyptians in the Old Testament against Israel. This is not a kind of vengeance that's coming on a nation from a nation.

Matter of fact, look up at the context in this passage. We've already talked about in verse 22, "these are days of vengeance." And when you see the word "vengeance" you need to ask yourself, "Who's vengeance?" It's a "great distress," verse 23 it says, "that's upon the earth and wrath against this people." Well, we see it's not just "a" people, "all" people, the world, the whole world. This is not, it says in verse 26, a foreboding of what's coming on Israel, it's not a foreboding of what's coming on Rome, it's a foreboding of what's coming on the entire world. That's a big, big deal. And if you want to say, "Where have I read about a tribulation that's so great, that is the greatest that it's ever been." Well, you don't have to go to church for very long, you didn't have to grow up in the Sunday school to know, if I want to know where that's explained in great detail, I can turn to the last book of the Bible and find this book called Revelation and beginning in Chapter 6, all the way through 19, it's a really dark and depressing stretch of the Bible, is it not? It's a really depressing part of the Bible because God is here bringing his vengeance on the world. And guess what it includes? A lot of the things that I just talked about or simply read in verse 25, "signs in sun and moon and stars, great distress on earth, perplexity among the nations," a lot about "the sea and the waves." All of that's in there, including "people fainting with fear and foreboding about the things that are coming on the world. The powers of the heavens are going to be shaken." That's not only looked to in the Old Testament about the end of the age, it's in the New Testament, all the way to the mid 90s A.D. when John pens on the island of Patmos the letter of Revelation. And he says in this great long letter, this book we call it, in Chapters 6 through 19, this horrible time of tribulation, a great tribulation, that's never been from the beginning of the world that will never be ever again. It's the worst of times, the absolute worst. And if you want to know whose vengeance it is, we don't have to look long in that section.

We have the scene in heaven in Chapters 4 and 5, and then in Chapter 6 of Revelation, he starts cracking open seals, and it's not the seals that we have in the ocean out here, it's the seals that were imprinted with some kind of insignia that kept parts of a scroll together and as you unrolled it you had to break those seals to read more. And every time a seal is broken, and the only person who can open it, it says, is "the lamb, as though he were slain." They're receiving all the worship of the peoples in heaven, it's Christ we're talking about, the lamb takes that scroll and unfurls it and breaks these seals and it's all about God's judgment on the world.

As my old pastor used to say, "Christ is coming back and he's real mad." That's what the word "wrath" means. Right? Christ is angry and he's angry at a world that's sinful. He's angry at a world that's rebellious. He's angry at a world that has the conscience, it has the Spirit that's trying to convict everyone, and it has the Church that's a light of the truth, it has the Bible that speaks of the truth, and yet they reject it, they turn their back against it, and God is very angry. "Oh, is God a God of love?" He's absolutely a God of love. Do you know what love is? It's not a feeling. Did you know that? Love is the expression of someone generously and kindly doing something for the good or well-being of someone else. That's what love is.

You want to know how God demonstrates his love right now to non-Christians? Primarily, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, it's by causing the rain to fall on the crops of the evil and the good so they can have food grow up out of the ground and they could eat and have full stomach, push back from the table, and say, "This is a good day." The sun rises on the evil and the good. They have a great day, nice light lit day, walks through the fields, they can go take a fiesta at the end of the day. I mean all of these things that they have, the common graces of God, all express the love of God for those people. That is not a feeling, it's an action of God. That's called Grace. We call it common grace because you don't even need to be a Christian to experience that grace. Non-Christians all over the country today will push back from a table and feel the satisfaction of a

digestive system that works, a tongue that tastes the food and a good day. Maybe they end the day with some intimate time with their spouse and they say, "today was a great Sunday before I go back to work." That's the common grace of God and God is loving the world that way.

But when you want to ask how God feels about the world, well that's a different matter. He doesn't feel good about a world that's turned its back on him, who's rebelled against him. And in Chapter 6 of Revelation to Chapter 19, we see all of these things, beginning with the scroll being unfurled, being the wrath of God on a world. It's not the wrath of men against the church, it's not the wrath of one nation against another nation, it's the vengeance of God upon the world. I know it comes at the end of time and there's one representative generation who experiences it. And if you want to know the time, the book of Revelation says, it's a seven-year period, which should be familiar to us from Daniel Chapter 9, there's a 70th week of Daniel that still there dangling out where God has a prophetic plan to prepare his nation and his city for the arrival of the King, the second arrival of the King.

And so we have this period of time that's going to be horrific. And Jesus said in Matthew 24, which is the extended version of the Olivet Discourse, "if it weren't cut short no one would survive it." But because of those who are being saved in that time, he calls them the elect, being saved primarily because there are 144,000 Jewish missionaries going out to convert these people. He said if it weren't for those people, you know, I wouldn't cut it short and the whole world would be destroyed. But it is cut short and there will be people who survived this time, but it's a time of my vengeance and my judgement on the last generation.

You can't get through the first chapter of that, Chapter 6 through 19, we can't get through the end of Chapter 6 without the people recognizing this as judgment. Let me read for you the last couple verses, the leaders of the world at that time, the powerful, not only the powerful, but everyone, slave and free, the high ranking and the low ranking, they "hide themselves in caves among the rocks of the mountain, they call to the mountains and the rocks they say this, 'fall on us and hide us from the face of him who's seated on the throne.'" Right? This is the father, "and the wrath of the lamb," his son, "for the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand?" We can't take it anymore.

Now when some guy in North Korea puts his finger on a button and launches a missile at America and all the things on your TV and radios go off and say, "Hey, we're being bombed," I'm not suggesting that's going to happen, but let's just say that were to happen, we'd know who to hate. Right? But when the sun starts blowing up and the moon starts falling apart or whatever is going to happen in the sky, you can't look at a picture on Wikipedia and say, "I hate that guy." That's why everyone knows this is not about nation's vengeance. This is about God's vengeance on the world and by the beginning of this, you can't even get through the first chapter of these judgments and the people are saying God is mad at the world. It'll be clear and they'll recognize it. As the Bible says throughout the book of Revelation, they still won't repent. It's a terrible time coming upon the world. And you and I ought to live like this world is not going to last. And in a sense, let me get very practical and pastoral, you and I ought to live like we don't love this place. "What are you talking about?" Turn in your Bibles to First John Chapter 2. "I'm supposed to love this world, aren't I?" Well, love it in the sense that God loves the world.

John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son." Why? Because his objective was to see them saved. But when we read the word "world" in John 3:16, I guarantee you what we're talking about in this sermon and what we're seeing in First John Chapter 2 verse 15, is a different definition of "world." And I know we kind of naturally interpret the word "world" based on its

context but I just want you to consciously do it here.

It says in verse 15. Are you there yet? First John Chapter 2 verse 15, "Do not love the world." Now, I know whatever is being loved in John 3:16, I want to be Christ-like, I want to be like God. I'd like to love the world the way that Christ and God love the world. How do they love the world? Well, Second Corinthians Chapter 5 says, we should love the world being ambassadors. We ought to know the fear of God and love them enough, the love of God ought to constrain us out of concern for them to share the Gospel with them because we don't want them to incur the wrath and judgment of God. But when it comes to the things of the world that I'm talking about, if God is really angry at the things that are done with late night comedians, if the things that God looks at and he sees praise at all these awards shows that go on. When we look at the magazines and we look at the blogs and we see all that's going on in the Internet and on social media, we look at that and we think this is what the world is all about.

We'll get advertisements, we look at the things going on in higher education in the ivory towers of academia, and we see those things and we realize are so far out of the pale of what God says is good and right and true. Those are the kinds of things we say, I want to be detached from that, I have to have a separate kind of thinking about my life as it relates to that. To go back to your youth group days, if you grew up in the church, you need to see you're "in" the world but you're not to be "of" the world. What does that mean? That means your affections, your values, should be distinct and different.

When the Bible says here, "Do not love the world," are you're looking at it, First John 2:15, "or the things in the world," it's going to define what we're talking about here. We're not talking about you loving your spouse or loving your kids or loving your parents or loving your neighbor enough to share the Gospel and be good to them. We're not talking about that. We're talking about a kind of love he's going to define in verse 16, that if you love the things in verse 16, these things in the world that he's about to define, "then the love of the Father is not in you."

Maybe in the margin you ought to put James Chapter 4. James Chapter 4 makes it very clear, when we start getting friendly with the world, and by that the things he's about to define in verse 16, when I say I know God is mad at the world and the rebellion of the world and the values of the world and the compromise of the world and all the transgressions of the world, but I kind of like it. I like to be entertained by it, I like to laugh at it, I like to be a part of the conversation, I like to look like a voyeur through the magazines and see myself as part of that world system, and I want the accolades and the praise and I want all the stuff that they have. I just want you to recognize that God says that makes you an adulterous. Let's just be really clear. You don't even have to be in bed with the world. You just have to be, it says, a friend of the world. If you make yourself a friend of the world, see, you make yourself an enemy of God. There's no way for you to flirt around with another woman, so to speak, without you being unfaithful to the God who says, this is what your life's all about.

You see, you're supposed to say, "Yeah, I live on the earth but I'm a citizen of heaven. I have a different constitution." This may be hard in our day when a lot of Christianity is just dumped in your lap to say, hey, just kind of make this a better life for yourself here and now. But you do recognize God's called you to step out from the world, even the word church in Greek, "Ekklesia," used over a hundred times in the New Testament, has that sense of calling you out from the rest. I understand it means to call together for an assembly, but the idea is you're called out from the rest, certainly as a church, to be distinctive and God says, be holy as I'm holy. What does holy mean? Separate, different, don't be like they are.

What kind of things are we talking about in the world? Verse 16. For all that's in the world, list three things: "The desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life." Now stop. Those three things, think this through. All of those things have a godly outlet, and in the kingdom of God, that were ultimately preaching about in this series, the coming kingdom, all of these things will be present. And that is, my flesh, not in a bad sense but in a redeemed sense, all that is good about being a human being, it will find its desires fulfilled. It's called gratification satisfaction. There's going to be satisfaction. OK?

And when it comes to the desires of the eyes there's lots of talk in the Bible about beauty in the kingdom. Matter of fact, it's described as a beautiful place and God himself has talked about a God of beauty. And we're going to enjoy the beauty of God and the beauty of real things that are important and virtuous to the Lord. And the pride of life. Well there'll be no pride of life and that word I think is in a category of its own. But we recognize when it comes to exalting one person and giving him glory or fame, well God's about that. He says I'm going to have a cabinet and there's going to be someone seated at my right hand and this according to the Father, to place that person there based on their Christian life.

And when it comes to people like the apostles, their names are going to be etched on the walls of the New Jerusalem. There's going to be fame and there's going to be prominence, there's going to be importance, there's going to be elevation and promotion. But those things are found in the economy of Scripture and the Bible in eternal, virtuous truths that God defines by his nature. Not by the world, the world's got its own definition of these things. The desires of the flesh. We're not talking about the righteous or normal natural side of what a normal natural human body might want, like a good meal, this lunch, this afternoon when you're hungry and you eat a decent lunch. We're talking about the desires of your flesh that go beyond, that transgress the boundaries of what God says is good.

And the desires of the flesh, you might say, those worldly pleasures, and when I use worldly, we're putting it now, defining it even, by the context here, those things that you know are a transgression of God's laws. They are corrupting in the end, they're not good, they're not satisfying and ultimately are not the things that God wants your life to be imbibing in. The worldly satisfactions or gratification that lies beyond the bounds of what God says is right and good and righteous.

And the desire of the eye, same thing, temporal beauty, a transient attraction, the surfacy kind of attraction that fuels, I don't know, let's just be blunt and frank, the porn industry, think that through. Let's picture this, let's picture a guy putting dollar bills in a G-string of a girl at a strip club being attracted to that and you'd say, "Well, there is an attraction there I suppose." But you'd know, I hope on a Sunday morning as your preacher's looking at you in the eye, that's not the kind of attraction that we're into.

But I think you'd know there's another kind of attraction, even a romantic attraction that you'd look at, let's picture now a couple with wrinkles and gray hair at their 50th wedding anniversary and they love each other and you were at that party celebrating their nuptials and their love and their romantic love. He leans over and kisses her and you'd say, that's a beautiful scene. There's something beautiful there. And even that man leaning over to kiss that bride of his for 50 years, you'd say there's some beauty in that and there's even beauty in the attraction of doing that. That's a beauty on a different category. And the world's saying, "Here's one that we want you to pursue. And here's the other one that, well, whatever, you want to be Ozzie and Harriet, I guess you can..."

We have one condemned and we have one exalted.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, where it says in the English Standard Version, the "pride of life." That sense of exaltation, that promotion. It's the promotion that the world wants to applaud you for, not for the virtues and the godliness and the righteousness that God says this promotes and exalts a man. Not those things. They stand in contradistinction to what the Bible says.

And you see it all throughout the world, the things you'll get praised for. I can go on YouTube this afternoon and say all kinds of things that would get thousands of likes, I guarantee you. I could go on YouTube and get hundreds of thousands of likes. As a Southern California pastor, I know exactly what to say and I could be on the news by the end of the night by the things that I say that the world would go, "Fantastic. Finally a pastor who's getting it." Right? I could do that. But they're not the things that God would say exalts a person. As a matter of fact, it may turn the world against you. Matter of fact, the Bible says it will turn the world against you. Everyone who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. We looked at that in the second installment of this series.

And all I'm saying is that God is all about you having gratification, attraction and beauty, having a sense of worth, but there's a world's definition of those things, and a version of those things that the world is trying to say, "Here's some worldly pleasures. Here's some temporal beauty. Here's some world's accolades." And it says, "Imbibe on this, drink on this, have this, gratify yourself, knock yourself out with this. This is what life's all about."

The Bible says, bottom of verse 16, "none of that is from the Father, it's from the world." "And," the reason I'm reading this passage, verse 17, "the world is passing away along with its desires." Now when you read the words "passing away" it seems like a euphemism. Right? Like when someone dies we say they passed away. And if you picture in that something that you shouldn't picture, let me correct you. It's not about God just kind of let this thing burn out. It's not like trash, even, that we put in a white plastic bag and zip it up and take it to the curb and drop it in the trash can. This is like a trash compactor. This is an active sense of God's judgment on a world. And the Bible says, that's what's coming.

As a matter of fact, he tells us when we read this in Luke and we studied it in Luke, where he tells the story of his coming back and he speaks of the reality of his return and he says it's going to be like it was in the days of Noah. It's going to be really bad. But there'll be an opportunity, all the while, for you to be saved. You can get out from the world, but you've got to step out from the world, you got to make your boat in this big barge called an ark, sit in that thing and wait for God's salvation. But you're going to have to leave your home, going to have to leave some of your friends, you got to step out from the crowd. You'll probably get ridiculed, just like Noah, who was building the ark was ridiculed.

And then it slips into another Old Testament example and says it's like Sodom and Gomorrah. Like Sodom and Gomorrah where God was going to rain down his judgement on those cities of the plains, but he gave an opportunity for the people to escape. And he told them to escape. And Lot, of course, was one of the prominent members of that community, he was called out as the nephew of very righteous and well-known man named Abraham and his godly wife Sarah. And while they had their flaws, they were certainly a paragon of what was right to trust in God and be righteous. And surely Lot, even in the New Testament, is described as someone who had righteous desires, and to live in those cities of the plains was a torture on his soul, being tempted like I hope you feel that



torture in this world with all the worldliness jammed at your face, at your eyes and your senses, you recognize this a hard place to live the Christian life.

But then he goes on to say this, the second shortest verse in the New Testament behind the verse "Jesus wept," is a little three-word verse. In the middle of all that about the Second Coming and knowing you've got to step out from the crowd and be ready for the return of Christ, you need to see yourself as distinct, you need to keep the world and its values at arm's length, he says this, "Remember Lot's wife." Talk about three words that seemed to come out of left field. Oh yes, speaking of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, "Remember Lot's wife."

Do you remember what happened to Lot's wife? Unless you're new to this, you know what happened a Lot's wife. Well, when the messengers came and said, "You got to get out of this city, God's going to destroy this city", one thing they said as they were taking them out of the city. "Don't look back." And she did. Right? She looked back. And what happened? God destroyed her right on the spot.

Well, you think, "Well, God was feeling pretty persnickety that day to judge her for that one... She just looked back. Well, that was it? She turned her neck muscles and her eyes went over there and you killed her?" Well, as others have rightly said, that may have been a small infraction, but it's certainly revealed a gigantic problem in her heart. Right? Here is a place that God was ready to destroy because his wrath, which is a Bible word but you know what it means, his anger was going to be spent on. And he said, "I'm tired of Sodom and Gomorrah, we're going to destroy it." And he said, "When you leave don't look back." And she looked back and God said, that's where your heart is. That's where your heart is.

You and I are living in a new Sodom and Gomorrah, are we not? It may not be as bad as the original Sodom and Gomorrah, but we're getting there, and our society and culture is working hard to get there as fast as we can. And I just wonder if you, in light of the destruction that's coming upon our world, are you ready to say, "Not only am I a Christian and hanging out with the Abrahams and the Sarahs and the Lots of this world, but I'm not going to join that team, come to church, be all about Bible study, small groups, discipleship, worship, all that, and keep looking back over my shoulder.

You think Jesus had that in mind in Luke Chapter 9 verses 57 through 62, when he talked about people who said, "I want to be a disciple." And the last one he said this, "Whoever puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God. There are some of you here today who I know you go to church, you think church is the right thing, you hear preaching, you think it's pretty cool, every now and then you get a good nugget, you take it home and try and apply it to your business. Listen, if this is just something for you that is a cultural thing but in your heart, really, when it comes Tuesday afternoon, I mean you keep looking back. This is all about your affinity and your affections for this world. The kinds of things we just talked about, worldly pleasures, temporal beauties, world's accolades, if that's your life, those are your affections, then we've got a problem. I think Christians can be tempted to do this and that's why James Chapter 4 says it's like adultery, you keep flirting with the world.

I know this is a bleak and gloomy sermon. But it's a gloomy passage. And the forecast says, the world's going away, God's going to destroy it. He's not going to carefully walk it to the curb, he's coming back with judgment. Live like the world's temporary.

Can we be done with that section of the sermon? OK. Verse 27. It's better, more positive, thankfully. This is a bright spot. "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." I hope your reference Bible has Daniel Chapter 7 in the margin there. You should definitely link those two in your mind. Here comes this one, like the Son of Man coming out of this cloud, presenting himself for the Ancient of Days, having all the authority and glory and dominion, and everyone's supposed to bow down and worship him. The Son of Man's coming.

Now the Son of Man came the first time very humbly in a Bethlehem stable and it didn't look much like the coming on a cloud with great power and glory, it didn't look like that. Well it wasn't. Something that the Old Testament couldn't see clearly. As I said before, it's like two peaks on two prophetic mountain tops with a big valley in between, which right now we know is at least 2,000 miles long. And what's envisioned in the Old Testament is the coming of the Messiah, but so often we have this kind of conflicted view of the suffering servant and a reigning king. Well, we know now, though, that it was going to come in two stages, the first coming of Christ, the second coming of Christ.

Well, the second coming of Christ is going to culminate after the worst tribulation that could ever come upon the world. He's going to come back, the Son of Man, and everyone is going to see him coming in a cloud with power and great glory. As a matter of fact, it's called there in the bottom verse 28, the redemption. Redemption of what?

The rest of the Bible, if you look carefully at it, speaks about the end times. It speaks about the Day of the Lord or the Coming of the Lord, and just like the first coming of the Lord was in stages, really, if you look at it, torn in part, torn in two pieces between a big valley of 2,000 years, the actual second coming has several prophetic features to it, which include several kinds of comings, if you will, of the Lord.

The most prominent one, that I hope in our circles you've heard of, is in First Thessalonians Chapter 4. It reflects those words in John Chapter 14 when Jesus said, "Hey, I'm going to go away. But if I do go away, I've got stuff to do, prepare a way for you, prepare a place for you, I'm going to come again and receive you unto myself that where I am you'll be also. I'm going to come and get you." Now First Thessalonians Chapter 4 puts it this way: those who are alive and remain until the beginning of this whole sequence of events under the umbrella of the Day of the Lord are going to be caught up together to be with the Lord and to meet him in the air and then forever be with him. So the beginning of a face-to-face relationship with the Messiah is going to start for us, it starts long distance now, I hope, as you're a Christian. You pray to him. You pray in his name. You worship him. The Christ that you worship long distance is going to now become an up close and personal face-to-face relationship, starting at a time, the Bible says, that will come, as First Corinthians 15 says, "with a twinkling of an eye." Immediately you will be caught up.

"Are you talking about the Rapture? Are you talking about the Rapture?" Yes, I'm talking about the Rapture. "Oh, I don't know. I don't know if believe in the Rapture. I looked it up on my phone. There is no word "rapture" in the Bible. I don't believe in the Rapture." You believe in the Rapture. I guarantee you believe in the Rapture. If you don't believe in Rapture you need to read your Bible because the Rapture is clearly in the Bible. What you need to figure out is when the Rapture takes place. "Rapture? It's not in the Bible?" No, it's translated there, "caught up."

We get the word rapture from the Latin translation of the Bible because if you take the Greek word that's in that passage "harpazo" and you translate it into Latin, which was the Bible of the Church

for a thousand years, where a lot of the theology became very systematized, codified and written down. They went to that Latin Bible, the Latin Vulgate that Jerome translated, and they chose those words to represent doctrines. Well the word there, almost transliterated perfectly, is the word "rapture." And that concept, we get it into English, rapture, you got that word translating harpazo, which by the way occurs 14 times in 7 books in the New Testament. So it's not a, you know, hapax legomenon, as they say, it's not just a one-time usage word.

And not only that, there are other words that describe the same exact thing, and that is a person being caught up into the sky to be with the Lord. As a matter of fact, we see that, I mean I know you believe in this one don't you, when Jesus in Acts Chapter 1 was on the Mount of Olives after the resurrection and the Bible says he was caught up, or taken up, we call it the Ascension, up into the sky, he ascended up into the sky.

Now it's a different verb, I understand, but it was a bodily taking up into the sky. And the messengers of God, at that point, said just as you saw him go, you're going to see him come back. "Well, how can he breathe up there?" This was the miracle of the taking up of a human body, just like we see in the Old Testament. Different language, I understand, but we see Enoch and the word there is he's "taken up" or he's "caught up." We see it of Elijah, with that whole fiery chariot thing. He was taken up into the sky. These pictures of being caught up, even Paul uses the word in Second Corinthians when he speaks about being caught up, using the same word, harpazo, that we see in First Thessalonians Chapter 4, when he says, "I was caught up into the third heaven into God's throne room, whether in spirit or in body, I don't know." Well if it was in body, we've got another picture of someone being physically taken up off the planet. He was brought back down.

But the idea of the Rapture is clearly in the Scripture and it's taught here prophetically in First Thessalonians Chapter 4 as Christ coming to take his Church. Now I could spend a lot of time trying to prove the timing of that, but let me simply say, when it comes to this 70th week of Daniel, the seven year period which the book of Revelation is clear on, the Book of Daniel, I believe is clear on, you've got at the end of this a redemption, a redemption for people who are assembled in Jerusalem with surrounding armies, not the one in 70 A.D., not the others even in subsequent generations or centuries, but the one that takes place at the end of the world described in the book of Revelation.

That one is the redemption of Christ. Christ comes to redeem his people and according to Zachariah 14 his feet touched the ground right there. There is a coming of Christ, I already quoted from Revelation Chapter 6, when he comes to the world in wrath. You know what they say? "Rocks fall on us because what's come upon the world is the wrath of the lamb and the one who sits on the throne and of the Father." Christ comes in wrath. Christ comes in redemption.

But before all of that, Christ comes to redeem his people, to use the words of Romans Chapter 8, redeem the body, or let's just use the other "R" word as long as we're trying to alliterate the sounds, to rapture his Church. He raptures his church, we have a covenant with the people of Israel, the re-establishment of this Israel is already in place. We have these series of months that are described in the book of Revelation, which equals seven years. You have great tribulation that's the worst that's ever been, starting with these sealed judgments, the trumpet judgments, the bowl judgments of God, and then you have Christ coming back to touch his feet down on the Mount of Olives. The New Testament parallel is Revelation Chapter 19, The Old Testament depiction is Zachariah Chapter 14, and you have here the deliverance of the people of Israel, who been saved during that period of time by the 144,000 Jewish missionaries from 12 different tribes, and then you have the establishment of



that millennial kingdom, we talked about previously in this series, and after that the eternal state.

Here's this period of time. The coming of the Lord is a series of events. If you want to talk about it, it's the coming of Christ for the Church to meet him in the air. It's the coming of Christ in wrath during the period of time, it's the greatest tribulation the world's ever seen. It's the coming of Christ to touch his feet down on the Mount of Olives where he left, to redeem the people of Israel.

And I say that because if you read our New Testament Daily Bible Reading yesterday morning it was on that road to Emmaus discussion and Cleopas was talking to Jesus about, "What? You don't know what happened in Jerusalem. Oh, the man working these miracles, this man of God, we thought he was the one to redeem Israel." There was the picture - redeeming Israel. The picture was, there's going to be the Messiah who is going to come who is going to save the nation from the oppression of the other nations.

It's exactly what they asked in Acts Chapter 1 when they said, "Now is the time that you're going to restore to us the kingdom?" Chapter 2. They're preaching it. Please get saved now, so Christ can be sent back down to bring those "times of refreshing" that were talked about in the Old Testament by the prophets. The "times of refreshing may come." The redemption of Christ for the nation of Israel at the end of the tribulational period. The coming of Christ in judgment and his wrath. The coming of Christ to grab his Church, and the coming of Christ, really, in the millennial kingdom to establish and fulfil his Old Testament promises.

You may not agree with that system of eschatology. That's what I'm convinced is the case. Either way when it comes to thinking about that sequence, however you sort that out in your eschatology, can you at least jot this down, number two on your outline, if you haven't already. "Think Daily of the King's Arrival." I hadn't given you that yet, had I? Think daily of the king's arrival, king's arrival, the Day of the Lord, the Coming of the Lord, the appearing of the Lord. All those biblical phrases are all, I believe, very clearly a series of events.

And it starts with one that comes completely out of the blue. It's an imminent return. An imminent return. Not an eminent return. Eminent, it will be eminent but it will be imminent as well. Imminent means it can happen at any time. We study this, did we not, in Luke Chapter 12 when he said you've got to be "Dressed and ready for action and keep your lamps burning, be like the men who were waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast so they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks." The whole point of that is be ready. Be ready. He ends that parable with this, "You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

I can preach about the world going away. You can say, "Yeah it, might. I'm sure I'm going to get to the end of this life of mine and I'm going to die and the world as I know it will be over." Well, it may happen a lot sooner than that. I'm not talking about you dying in a car accident. I'm talking about the reality of Christ saying, "I'm going to come back at an hour you don't expect." The only way I can be ready for an hour that I don't expect is to always be ready. And he said, "Be ready," so that any time you hear the knock you can be ready to go. Think that through carefully.

You and I need to be ready to leave this planet because life as we know it could be over, the Church could be extracted, the wrath of God can be poured out on this planet, and then the final battle of Armageddon, the Bible says, the coming back of Christ to save or redeem his people, to bring those "times of refreshing" that will be inaugurated by the millennium kingdom, that's all part of this plan, but it starts with Christ's return for his Church that could take place at any time. You need to think

about that every day.

And if you think about it every day I guarantee you this, it's going to change the way you make decisions, particularly about the temptations of this world. If you know that at any moment, to put it in biblical terms, that our betrothed husband could return at any time, you're not going to be flirting with other men. Right? You're going to understand that your love and friendship with this world is out of place. Think daily of the king's arrival. There's so much there to unpack in your small groups this week. Live like the world's temporary. Don't be so attached here.

Think daily of the king's arrival and then lastly, verse 28. Here are instructions, I believe, for the nation of Israel reassembled in the Time of Jacob's Trouble, in the last great tribulation and they're told this, "When you see these things taking place, straighten up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Now, there's a parallel here, follow me now, if you will. The Great Tribulation starts with the seals, the trumpets, the bowls. It increases, the Bible says, like labor pains upon a woman until finally Israel's backed into a corner, Christ comes back and delivers them and redeems the nation. That paradigm of things getting worse, but you, as these things get worse, you lift up your heads, straighten up, your redemption's coming, that parallel to the church age before that. You can take the church age, lay that on top of the great tribulation and say, there are some parallel lessons here. And that is, what do we learn about the church age? It's going to get dark, it's going to get worse.

Second Timothy Chapter 2 says, things are gonna go from bad to worse. We're going to see men, evil men and imposters, going from bad to worse. You're going to see really difficult times in the end days. So in the church age it's going to get worse. There's going to be tribulation, not the Great Tribulation, not the greatest tribulation that the world has ever seen, but increasing tribulation. It will be the wrath of men against godly people. Then you're going to see the wrath of God against the ungodly people.

But in this age, all I'm saying is it gets darker for us, as we looked at in the second installment of this series, don't get discouraged. I'll put it this way, number three, "Maintain an Optimistic Hope" about the coming of the Lord. Because at one point everything's going to be changed. And all I can tell you is that you and I are easily discouraged when things get worse and worse and worse and worse and they will. And at one point it's going to really get worst and it's going to turbocharge get worse when the people of God, I believe, are taken out of this world, and then God launches a missionary assault on the people of Israel through those 144,000 who he's going to call to himself miraculously. But the world itself is going to be falling apart, including cosmic signs in the sun and the moon and the stars and the sea, and it's going to be a mess.

But even in the midst of that mess those Israelites can be told, "Listen, as bad as it gets, lift up your eyes, your redemption's drawing near." And while we can't, in any way, come up with a timetable in the church age, we don't know when Christ is coming back, that's the imminent return of Christ, even though there is a timetable in this tribulational period. All I'm telling you is, you can be heartened by the fact that, though it gets darker in this forecast between now and these end time events, listen, it's going to be all right.

Here's why. You and I can recognize, Romans 8:18, one of my favorite passages, that "the bad of the present situation is not as bad as the good that's coming." Follow this now. The bad of all the situations that we may experience in the temptations and the persecutions and the frustrations and

the tortures we might feel, even in our own hearts, in a society that's degenerating, it's going to be a whole lot better when we get there. And the good that's coming is going to be so much better on some kind of scale than the bad that we measured before.

I put it this way. Before I could go to the park, Whaley Park was the place I like to go when I was a kid, my dad made me on a Saturday mow the lawn, which I hated. Mow the lawn. "You can't go to the park until you mow the lawn." So I had the assignment, my friends were already there, they were already throwing the football around or the baseball around depending on what season it was, I wanted to get to the big park, this boundless park, where I could run around on the grass over there, but right now I got this patch of grass and I hate it and I've got to cut it and it's hot and I don't want to do it. My friends are at the park, I want to go. "Well, you can go but you've got to cut the grass."

See, the thing that kept me going, the fact that it might take me 45 minutes to cut the grass, is I can get four hours this afternoon, six hours this afternoon at the park doing whatever I want over there. I can't wait to get done with this to get on to that. But I got to do this. I got to go through this. Dad's got me going through this and I got to do it, but it's not going to be half as bad as the good that's over here.

To read the passage, Romans Chapter 8 verse 18, he says, "I consider it nothing..." You shouldn't even compare the two. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us." You're in the middle cutting the lawn and some pretty hot circumstances, but the kingdom is coming and Christ is going to return for his Church.

I don't have time for any of this but Second Peter Chapter 3, it is on the back of the worksheet, at least the first seven verses. I'd love you to go all the way to verse 13. Don't be dissuaded, as long as I'm being an alliteration pastor this morning, don't be discouraged, don't be dissuaded. Dissuaded. How would we be dissuaded? Well, you're dissuaded even by Christians today. I read a book this week about apocalyptic fever. Right? Apocalyptic fever. Recommended by Christian friends, Christian publisher, Christian writer and basically looking at guys, I suppose like me, who are going to be preaching this weekend on the apocalypse, saying, "Oh man, you guys, settle down, pull it back, dial it back, man. Don't get everybody excited, you might be writing some more books about prophecy."

Listen, you understand they make a caricature out of the prophecy nut. And I'm not saying that's the only doctrine in the Bible, but whenever I get to a passage about prophecy, for that week at least, I want to be a prophecy nut and I want to make sure that that application lingers throughout my Christian life. And the lingering application throughout your Christian life is the world is temporary, it's coming to an end. But Christ is coming back. Set your hope on that. Think about it all the time. Say with the early church, Maranatha. Get your heart there.

And I'm telling you, we're dissuaded, not only by the critics who say, as it says in Second Peter 3, "Where's the promise of his coming? It's not going to happen, it's been 2,000 years." But even from a big and growing popular area of the Christian community that says, "You guys, stop talking about the return of Christ. I mean, you guys just settle down." I think they're afraid that they're going to be embarrassed. They're embarrassed because we talk about this stuff.

You would be embarrassed, I assume, if you talk anything at all about this sermon to your co-workers in the lunch room on Tuesday. "I went to church on Sunday." "Well, what did they talk

about?" "The end of the world." "Oh really?" "Yeah, and the coming of Christ." "Yeah, right." I mean think about that. And yet the Bible, as I said, makes this forecast crystal clear. And the leading prophetic voice in the New Testament is Christ himself. All I'm telling you is don't be dissuaded, don't lose your hope. As a matter of fact, the whole point of that, the punchline of all of that, verse 13. "We've set our hope..." I love this. "We've set our hope on this the promise and we are waiting," based on God's promise, "for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwell."

As long as I'm in Second Peter Chapter 3 and I'm alliterating, let's add one more. Don't be discouraged, don't be dissuaded. And here's one more, don't be delinquent. Don't be delinquent. The implication of the passage that God is waiting to send his Son back to grab his Church. Why? Because he is patient, not because he's slow, because he's patient. Why? Because he wants more people to come to repentance. Now, I take from that, when he says a few verses later, "you ought to hasten the coming of the Lord." How can I speed this thing up?. That's what "hasten" means. How can I speed up the coming of the Lord? Well, the only thing I can do, I suppose, in the context of this passage, is to be about getting people face-to-face with repentance. The message of the Gospel of repentance. So, I want to tell people to repent. I would be delinquent if I said, "Yeah, I'm going to wait for the return of Christ, but when it comes to my neighbor, my friends, my co-workers, my extended family members, I'm not even going to talk about any of this God stuff with them." Don't be delinquent.

And not only that, I guess I should give you one more from Second Peter Chapter 3, it says, "If all these things are thus to be dissolved/destroyed, what sort of people ought you to be in all holiness and godliness?" You can be delinquent, not only in your evangelism, you could be delinquent in your sanctification. I've already said, if you know Christ is at the door and at any moment you could see him face-to-face, I hope it changes the way that you live. Well, we dealt with this in the first point, that you keep the world's values at arm's distance.

It's not said any better than in First John Chapter 2, when God says to us this, verse 28, "Now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not to shrink back in shame at his coming." Christ is going to come and I hope that you're not laughing at the wrong things, hanging out at the wrong place, being the kind of person that reflects nothing but the world that he's coming back to destroy. I hope that you are not delinquent in those things. The world's going to be destroyed and all of its desires with it, to quote First John 2. Then, back to Second Peter 3, "what kind of people ought you to be in all holiness and godliness."

If you're going to prepare for an earthquake, there'd be several things that you should do, fundamental preparations. If you're going to prepare for the end of the world, there are some things you ought to do. And it's not going to land you on Doomsday Preppers, it's not going to get you on the program, because it's not about you getting guns or bunkers or building some kind of stronghold in the rocks of the mountains. It's going to be about you getting your heart ready for the coming of the Lord.

The number one assignment, even at his birth, that was prophesied about the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, as he comes into power and spirit of Elijah, it says, is, and I love the punchline. It's to... I better quote it. It's why I write things down. After it says "he's going to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," here it comes, "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." That's why it's hard to remember, it's kind of awkwardly worded, but there it is, "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Now I can talk about the message that I said we are supposed to bring to our neighbors, but how about just for a second you'll let the preacher bring that message to you. Are you prepared? When that forerunner of Christ came to prepare people for the first coming and we're now preparing people for the second coming, his message was repent. In Luke Chapter 3 we studied it, he went out there and talked to people whether they're Roman soldiers, whether they were tax collectors, no matter who they were, and he said "repent." Then he said this, "bear fruits in keeping with repentance." Is your life reflecting that you're ready? Are you sure you're ready?

Christ promised us this: he's not going to tell us when he's coming back. The end times events could start at any moment. It could happen this afternoon, next week, next month. Don't wait. Don't sit there like so many foolish people do and say, "Well... I'm going to live my life for me now. I'm going to hang out with the world, have all that lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, lust of the pride of life, I want all that now. But when I'm old and on my deathbed and I have my last bout with, whatever, cancer I got, then I'll get right with God." And sadly, you'll have motivation for that because every now and then you'll hear of some deathbed conversion. Don't bank on it.

The Bible makes it clear, at any moment this could be over for us, not because you die in a car accident, although that's a possibility, but because Christ could say we're done. "I'm going to grab my Church and then I'm going to unleash my anger on this world and then I'm going to prepare Israel for the millennial kingdom. But I'm going to come and we're going to have a group of people who were prepared and a group of people who weren't." That's the kind of thing that the author of Apocalypse Fever would say, "Just don't scare people with that."

Here's the number one preacher according to Christ, Luke Chapter 3, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." And then he says this. Why? "Because the axe is already laid at the root of the tree. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." If you don't want a hell fire and brimstone preaching, well then you are going to have to go to a church that never preaches biblically. Because, at some point, the Bible is going to drive us to preach like John the Baptist and say when we reach a passage like this that says the world is going to be destroyed, you better make sure that your heart is ready, and not only that Christians, don't keep looking back. "Remember Lot's wife." Get ready. Prepare yourself. Because if you disregard the warnings you won't prepare yourself. If you're not prepared, then you're going to be on the wrong side of history.

December 7, 1941. December 7th 1941. Does that mean anything to you? U.S. Navy Lieutenant Kermit Tyler was told the following: "Sir, the radar shows a large formation of planes heading for Hawaii." To which he famously or infamously responded, "Don't worry about it. It's nothing." Now, of course Lieutenant Tyler should have heeded the warning, scrambled some planes, and perhaps he could have spared Pearl Harbor the devastating loss that we, in America, looking back on, grieve as a horrific loss. But he didn't.

And I don't want to draw too many tight parallels here, but I think being stationed in Hawaii may have had something to do with this. Can you imagine living in Hawaii as your assignment? You're suppose to be a warrior, a fighter, vigilant, on the edge, ready at any time and... "Hey, surf's up today, man. I mean, I'm wearing Hawaiian shirts, I'm wearing flip flops, I love being stationed here." I think, maybe, that had something to do with taking the edge off of those warnings. I mean, I know there's more to it than that and you're an expert on the World War II and Pearl Harbor probably. You'll correct me on the patio but I do know this, as a preacher who has probably preached a lot more than you have to people in Orange County, there's a lot of complacency that we



Californians have about spiritual warnings in the Bible. Because we sit in air-conditioned rooms like this, we drive nice cars, we have padded seats at church, everything's pretty copacetic for us. But the warning in Scripture is right there and we got to be ready. "Sir, the radar shows a large formation of planes heading for Hawaii." The radar is very clear about what's coming on this entire world.

I just want you to not say, "Don't worry about it. It's nothing." The ball's in your court. I've preach my message for the weekend. You got to decide what you are going to do with it.

Let's pray. God, I know the return of Christ has so many facets to it, not just in terms of the sequence of events in the prophetic calendar, but two primary facets to it when we think about how it affects our hearts. In one way, and we sing songs about this and it is true and right, that we anticipate the return of Christ, we can't wait to see the Lord face-to-face, we want to hasten that day, not just to see people's souls saved but to see our faith realized, our hope vindicated, and God, that's perfectly appropriate and it's biblical. We look forward to the day when our faith is sight. We can't wait for the kingdom to come.

The forecast of the coming kingdom, it gives us great hope and joy in one sense, but it also brings a sense of sobriety to us, that we live in a new Sodom and Gomorrah, a world that is increasingly rejecting you and one day you will return in judgment. So God, may we be the people who are prepared, so that we are ready for you when you return in a twinkling of an eye, when you have that moment when you take home your people in this church age that we will be people who are like that passage says in Luke, ready, our lamps are burning and anytime the master knocks, we're ready to quickly open the door.

God prepare us, make us think more about the return of Christ this week than we've thought about our entire lives. Get us ready. Let us cry out with the early church "Maranatha."

In Jesus name, Amen.