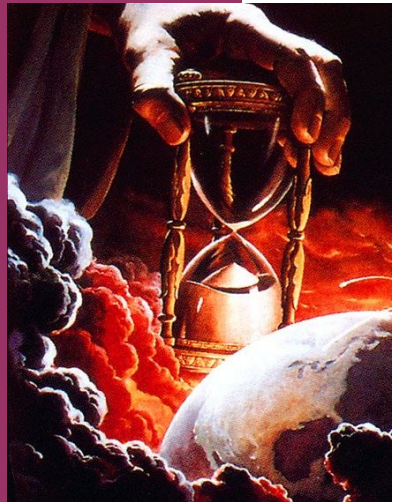
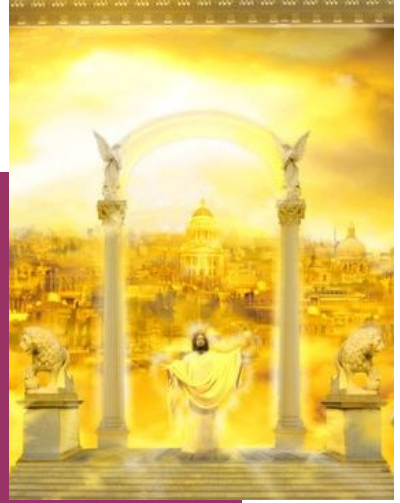


Volume 10: Connecting The Pieces



Things to Come
and Why They Matter
An Introductory Study in Prophecy

Prophecy Series Sermons

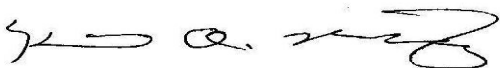
Our sermon series for the summer of 2014 investigated the subject of prophecy. The response by the congregation at Vistoso Community Church was so encouraging, that we are publishing each of the sermons both in booklet form and online on our web site.

The first five sermons were released in booklet form in January of 2015. These are the final five booklets that complete our Prophecy series:

- Volume 6: When and Why Will the Believing be Leaving?
- Volume 7: The Signs of the Times
- Volume 8: Two Destinies
- Volume 9: Above the Fray
- **Volume 10: Connecting the Pieces**



In His grace,

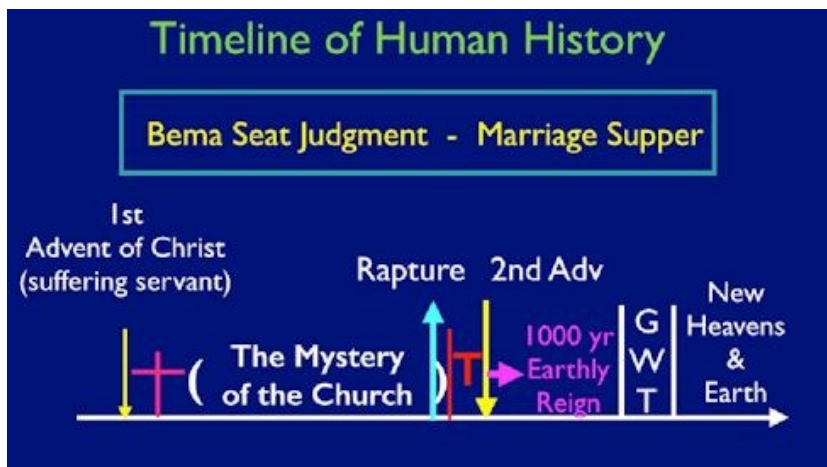


Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church

Volume 10: Connecting the Pieces

An Introduction

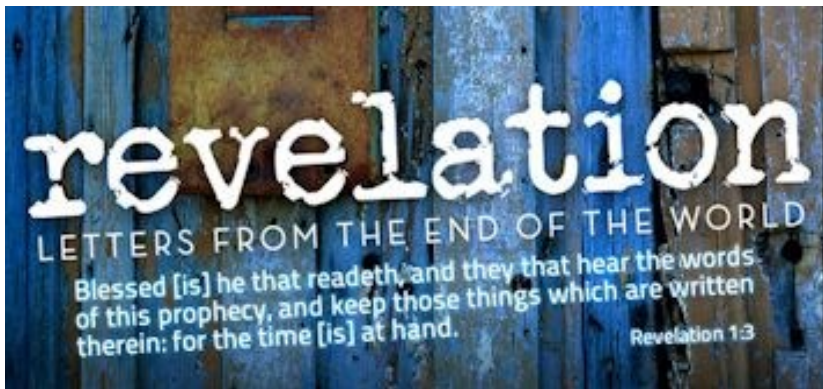
During the course of the past nine lessons, we have built the following prophetic timeline of things to come:



We began our study at the point of the Second Advent of Christ, as a reference point, and then in the lessons that followed worked our way both forward and backwards in time. I remind you that rather than rely on human hypotheses and philosophies regarding the future, we instead carefully extracted our understanding of what the future holds from the Word of God. We have basically done a survey of God's prophetic timeline, and of course there is much detail remaining for future study. Nonetheless, I believe this meets our need as a church fellowship in that it gives us a common frame of reference we can all share.

For many of you, much of this may be quite new. Give it time to settle. Go back over the various lessons, make sure you can see how we extracted our framework from the text of Scripture, and give these things the careful consideration they deserve. By no means have we tried to push any theological system upon you; rather we have let the Scriptures speak for themselves in building our theology—and that is as it always should be.

Perhaps you are still wondering to yourself, “Why even get into prophecy like this? Isn’t it just opening a *can of worms*? Doesn’t it just cause a lot of division, and isn’t it all just based on pure speculation?” As to the why—let me remind you again of a verse I drew to your attention at the beginning of our study: Revelation 1:3



Just reading and hearing the prophecy contained in the book of Revelation brings a blessing to the disciple of Christ, and, of course, there is always a premium placed by God on responding to what He reveals. So even if much of this is new to you, I would encourage you to go through it again, study the Scriptures, and prove to yourself that what we have really accomplished is to develop a coherent framework of understanding—drawn straight from the Word of God.

No secular voice can speak with any such authority, and even many religious voices speak more from a standpoint of protecting their own theology rather than from a clear and coherent interpretation of God's Word.

Furthermore, even though we are into our tenth booklet on the subject of prophecy, I want to remind you that I was purposely short on depth and detail—for my intent was not to make us prophecy experts, but rather we began this study for a number of very important and related purposes:

- **To instill hope!** Remember a Biblical hope is a certain confidence that God will see us through, especially in difficult times.
- **To prompt godliness!** For the study of the prophetic future is always meant to result in godly living in the present. In other words, understanding the unfolding of God's plan for the future is meant to impact our personal purity in the present.
- **To give us confidence.** Specifically, that everything is under God's sovereign control, for He *"makes known the end from the beginning, from ancient times things yet to come."* (Isaiah 46:10)

I will have accomplished these intents, if, each time after the study of this topic, you say to yourself, "I have been spiritually encouraged. I see the need to live my life in the present in light of eternity. No matter how things are unfolding, I have confidence that God remains firmly in charge and His purposes will prevail!"

Now in this closing lesson I have two goals:

- First, rather than focusing on investigating new material, we are going to spend our time consolidating our gains by stepping back and seeing how things fit together; and then, by making some application.

- Second, I would like to show you how the study of prophecy connects with the communion remembrance, so that you might in the future connect the practice of communion in the present with the certainty of God's plans and purposes in the future.

The Big Picture

So let's begin the process of stepping back and looking at the big picture. You and I are living during the time-frame of the Church—that great mystery that was hidden for ages and generations (during the Old Testament), but now is revealed for all to see and is meant to put on display the glory of God. So when we consider carefully both the Church and what is yet to come, we should be asking ourselves, “What does what we have learned about the future mean for us today? What is the *take-home* message of this study?” It is very important for us to do this after a study of this kind lest we just get used to moving on to the next topic without being transformed by the teaching of God's Word. So let me suggest three things that we ought to consider:

Recalling the Rapture

As we consider the Rapture of the Church! Recall the Scripture in I Thessalonians that I have presented here in two parts with comments inserted:

**But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren,
concerning those who have fallen asleep. . .we who
are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord,**

(To which coming does Paul refer? We have learned it is the coming of Christ to snatch away His Bride to Himself—that where He is, we may be also. (John 14:1-3)

...will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. I Thessalonians 4:13-17

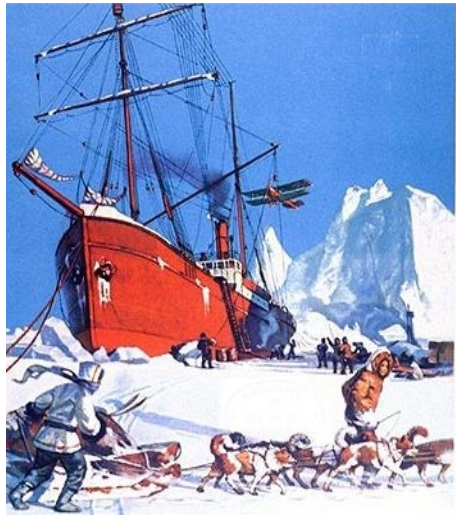
Again, I remind you that this coming of Christ for His Bride could occur at any time—this year, this week, even today! As one Bible scholar of our day, who has been studying prophecy for 30 years, has quipped, “I’m not looking for signs anymore, I am listening for sounds!” So how is this to affect the Church? It is to cause us to act in light of what is theologically called *immanence*. Immanence means that we are to live each day as if Christ could return at any moment; that is to have a certain eagerness, not only for His return, but that we would be found fully engaged in His work when He does return.



Can you imagine the difference it would make if this was one of the fundamental guiding thoughts of our lives? Do you remember the illustration of Sir Ernest Shackleton’s team of Antarctic explorers? After being cut off from their expedition leader, with circumstances growing more uncertain by the day, they lived each day in light of the *Boss’s* certain return. Every day they *unpacked* only those things necessary to get through the day, and each

day they packed up everything in order to be ready to leave at a moment's notice upon the Boss's return. Day after day they lived this way—as if the inhospitable shores of Elephant Island were not really their home!

Can you imagine the way our lives might be different if we lived that same way—from the spiritual standpoint? For that is the express reason why God has



revealed to us the limited information about the coming Rapture of the Church—so that we might realize this earth is not our home. Rather, we are here on a mission for our Lord until He comes to take us to Himself.

But, in reality, how many of us have unpacked and *set up shop* here in this world as if we were here for the long haul. We have often so invested ourselves in this world that, if Christ did return sometime this coming month, we would be disappointed because it would interfere with the plans we have made. Is the underlying cry of the soul *Maranatha*, or would we prefer to not be interrupted by the Lord? Are we more concerned about being found faithfully engaged in service when the Lord returns, or have we pushed that whole concept to the back of our mind as so much uncertain religious dogma?

Can I give you a practical example that I think applies to our church fellowship? As God provides financial where-withal to this fellowship—what should we do with it?

As most of you know, we have some outstanding debt—should we pay it off, or should we use our additional monies to take on more ministry?

Let me lay out the two competing world-views we are talking about, and show you how the applications differ.

First, Matthew chapter 24 says:

...Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

Matthew 24:45-46

On the other hand, the website for one of the nearby churches in our vicinity says this: “... ***we take the Bible seriously, not literally.***...”

Do you see the difference, and how that difference will likely shape almost everything we might do? For on the one hand making the first passage a priority means we must make being found “doing His ministry” an absolute priority.

On the other hand, taking the Bible seriously and not literally allows a church fellowship to sort and choose what parts of God’s Word they are going to obey, and justify whatever course of action they think best. In short, it allows the final authority to rest within the counsel of man and not God.

I can tell you on behalf of our church leadership, that although we want to be good stewards and manage our debt responsibly, we have made the decision to turn part of everything the Lord gives us right back into ministry. By doing that, when He returns, this fellowship will be found *faithful and wise* accomplishing in *due season* the ministry He has called us to accomplish!

Recalling the Millennial Kingdom

I am sure you remember that this is a time of nearly perfect environment, universal prosperity, swift and perfect justice, long-life, and the list goes on. For this is what is going to happen (and not until then) when the Lord Jesus Christ is on the throne. But then something happens! Satan is released and he rallies a great army of followers to himself. How can this happen, and more importantly, what is the message for us?

As much as anything this gathering of evil in a perfect world reinforces our understanding of the condition of man's heart, and just how lost he really is. For Scripture tells us:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? Jeremiah 17:9

So when it comes right down to it—what man needs more than anything else is not a change in his environment, redistribution of wealth, improved health, or any of those things man sees as necessities for a perfect world. What man really needs is a change of heart! The Bible calls this a *spiritual birth*! And this is something only God can do through His Spirit in response to the truth of His Word.

I am not saying that social programs never do any good—but I am dogmatically saying that at the best they are a means to Gospel hearing, and at worst a false lead or distraction. We need to be very careful to focus our primary energies on the one thing that can lead to a transformed heart and a change in eternal destination.

This is one reason that God has planned *the experiment* of the Millennium! This is why He has laid it all out ahead of time. For He isn't just telling us what is going to come next, but rather teaching us an enormously important principle—specifically, that none of the things that man thinks will address his easily proved depravity are actually the answer. For the Millennium teaches us that if the King of kings and Lord of lords can't reform society from the outside in—then it simply can't be done, and we as the Church are simply tilting at windmills when we devote our energies to trying.

What's needed is a new creation from within, and that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ—and that is the content of the message to which we need to bear witness. That is our primary calling!



Recalling the Tribulation, Great White Throne, and the Bema Seat of Christ

What do all three of these have in common? They involve judgment! The Tribulation describes an unprecedented time of the outpouring of God's wrath against Satan, his unholy trinity, and unbelieving man. The Great White Throne documents the final judgment (Second Death) that is the destiny of those of all ages who have rejected God. And lastly, the Bema Seat involves the judgment of the lives of Church-age believers before their Lord.

Now in our day we have been deceived regarding the concept of judgment—badly deceived! For how often do you hear the judgment to come for believers brought up within Christian circles? And, even less often in our day, how often is the concept of future judgment taught to the unbeliever? Why it has become anathema for the Christian to broach this subject. Is this ignoring of judgment Biblical?

“God, who made the world and everything in it. . . And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. . . we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Acts 17:24-31

In context, the above was Paul's message of hope to a lost culture. And do you see that it contained not only the message of redemption and reconciliation that is available in Christ, but also a message of impending judgment in order to prompt mankind to obey God's call to repent!

And, what is the proof of not only the adequacy of Christ's payment for sins but also the reality of a coming judgment? Why, it is the resurrection of Christ! The resurrection validates both. For this reason, it should be no surprise that Satan attacks the reality of the resurrection, since it is such an essential part of not only the payment for sin, but also the judgment to come for those who fail to respond.



So then, the first area in which we have been deceived is with respect to the reality of a judgment to come. It is as if we think we are going to be able to say, “What, I am going to be judged because I rejected the work of Christ on my behalf? How could I have known?” The answer includes both the fact of revealed prophecy and the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Man can pretend the whole concept of judgment has caught him by surprise, but don’t for a second think that God is obligated to go along with the charade for He has clearly revealed what is to come, and called us to come to Him via repentance based upon this very same revelation!

Furthermore, there is a second count on which we have been deceived. How many of you have heard unbelievers—both religious and irreligious say, “How could a loving God ever condemn anyone to hell for all eternity?” In fact, maybe you have wrestled with this very same issue yourself! First of all, I want you to realize that to frame the question this way is to attempt to isolate the love of God from all other aspects of His character. In other words, it is to propose a God who is love, but not simultaneously righteous, or just, or all-knowing, or all-powerful. In short, it is to make God into something that could never be, and which is completely outside our every day experience as to how His character functions.

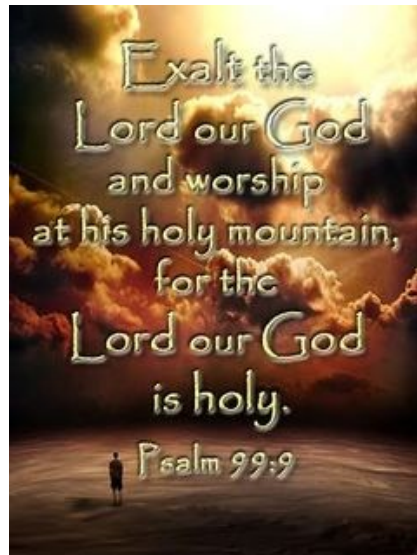
My Mom was certainly a very loving individual; but it was her great strength and balance of character which made, even as a young child, the love that she expressed so different from that which I observed in every other mom in the neighborhood.

Worse yet, once this fabricated idea of God's character takes hold, it leads people to say completely nonsensical things like, "I've lived a good life, I've had a good run, I'll take my chances with the *man upstairs!*" It is as if we are staking our eternity on the fact that God can't fail us.

Now follow this principle very closely—God has preempted this whole line of deception by clearly and descriptively laying out the judgments to come as part of His plan for the ages. Man can fool himself, but does so to his own extreme peril for he has no legitimate excuse. For God has in effect said, "My children, those who have trusted in the work of My Son on their behalf, will be evaluated under one set of criteria. While those who have persisted in rebellion and the delusion of autonomy from God will be judged under another set of criteria. In fact, these, who have not believed, will have, by default, forced me to include them with the same judgment that has been decreed for the Devil and his fallen angels, that is eternal death in the Lake of Fire!"

Do you see it? When it comes to the issue of judgment, lost mankind is acting like a kid on the playground who is trying to stretch a double into a triple. Acting as if the worst that could happen is to get thrown out at third—in which case all one has to do is to get up, dust one's self off, and go back to playing. Simply acting as if there are no real consequences. When in reality, we are talking about separation from all that is good—forever, and trading it in for eternal damnation. The consequences and ramifications are both huge and eternal.

Worse yet, do you realize from what source lost people have in part gotten this warped view of reality? From us! We, in the church, have let the truth about God become a one-dimensional message. By that I mean we faithfully communicate that He is loving—and He is! Furthermore, this message must be so clear and compelling that even the most down and out human being



knows that God is willing to reach into their lives and save them. But at the same time we must also communicate that our God is a Holy God! We must communicate this message clearly enough that people realize that apart from His salvation, there is no hope but only a fearful expectation of judgment (Hebrews 10:26), because that is what a Holy God must do!

Let's consider for a moment one of the most dramatic scenes in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah is at a cross-roads in his ministry. The beloved king of the nation has died, and yet God has much for Isaiah yet to accomplish. It would seem to make sense that God would come to Isaiah and declare His love for the prophet and the people of Israel. Instead, He gives Isaiah a vision of heaven. There we see the throne of God high and lifted up; the train of His robe fills the temple; so majestic is our God that the seraphs are calling out,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!”

It will be worth the effort to *unpack* this a bit further. The Hebrew word translated *holy* carries several connotations. It means to be set apart as in a *cut above*. It carries the connotation of absolute moral purity. And it has the idea of that which is pervasive—in other words, it is not an addition to the list of God's characteristics, but it effects every aspect of His character.

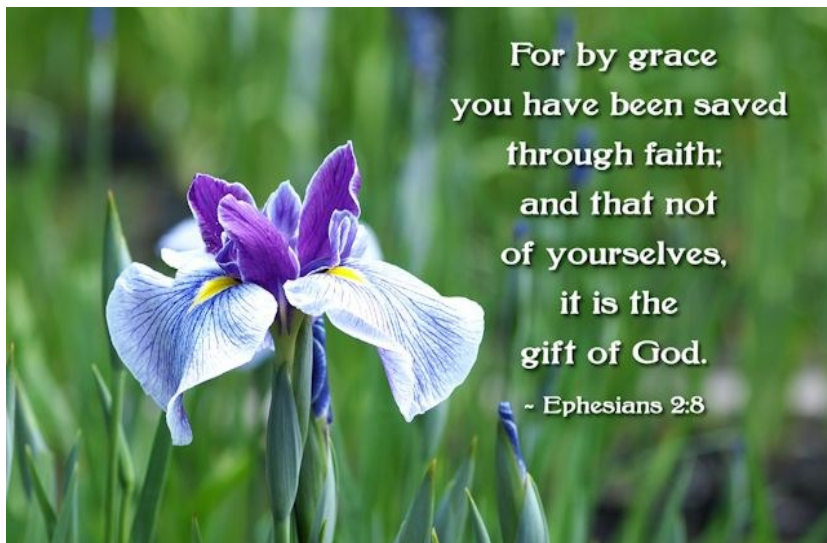
It is essential to realize that God has a **holy** sovereignty, a **holy** righteousness, and even a **holy** love that is absolutely *pure* and a *cut above* those characteristics from any other source. If we deny this, then we are denying what God is really like. For me, the wonder of our salvation is really two equal parts. First, the wonder of the love of God whereby He died in my place even when I was in rebellion against Him. Second, the wonder of how God found a way via the cross to satisfy the requirements of His holy justice and His holy righteousness, for they are equally part of His nature. Without their satisfaction, there would be no salvation for mankind.

Organizing the Lessons

Let me see if I can carefully organize this for you. God's love is expressed to lost mankind in *common grace* in general, and at the cross in particular.

- **Common grace** includes such things as the magnificently balanced planet on which we live, an environment capable of producing food, sustaining life, and so forth. Every member of the human race, whether they acknowledge it or not, partakes of this aspect of the grace of God.

- **Grace through the Cross.** On the other hand, the grace of God which is able to save mankind is available in no other way than through the cross of Jesus Christ! Only those who place their trust in the person and work of Christ receive the blessing of this *special* or particular category of grace.



Common Grace Buys Us Time

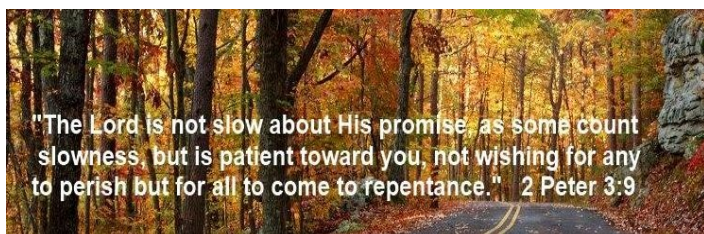
God's common grace gives us time to receive by faith God's love manifest through His Son. If we received what we deserved, we would all be blotted out in an instant. However, God graciously allows time for us to respond to the Gospel—to choose to receive by faith what He has done on our behalf. Lost mankind "lives and breathes" because the love of God allows it (Acts 17:25), but has no other claim to the love of God than that offered through the cross.

The Grace of the Cross Gives us Salvation

If man rejects the cross, a correct understanding of God should lead us to the reality that what remains is only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire (Hebrews 10:26). A correct understanding is not some squishy concept of a God who lets anything go.

Follow this carefully, this is the reason for including revelation regarding the Tribulation and the Great White Throne Judgment within the scope of information revealed within the Bible. Specifically this revelation is included that we might understand the depth of what is at stake and the *weight* of the consequences. Eternal damnation is the lot of those who reject the plan and provision of God at the cross.

Even if we have responded to the cross, we must still realize what is at stake so that we are not lazy or apathetic with our neighbors, children, and acquaintances. For when a person steps out of this life, if all they have to cling to is an epitaph something like: "He was a really good guy. . .", they are going to face a kind of hopeless eternity that should bring us to our knees and motivate us to hold out the truth.



Perhaps you are thinking, "This just doesn't quite fit my idea of a loving God. How could He condemn anyone to the Lake of Fire—forever?" In answer, God doesn't choose to condemn a man, for He is not willing that any should perish (II Peter 3:9).

Rather, it is the rebel who refuses to accept the offer of life provided by the love of God. In his rebellion, the rebel thinks he is going to dictate terms to the Sovereign God of the universe, and part of this dictating of terms is to declare what a loving God would and would not do.

Let me remind you of what the Bible actually teaches.

Jesus Opened the Seals

We must not forget who it was that opened the “seals” that begin the outpouring of the wrath of God known as the Tribulation? Based upon Revelation 6:1, it is none other than the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; and furthermore, He was the only one found worthy to do so.



There you have it—as an act of love He died for the sins of the entire world, but as the ultimately worthy One He initiates judgment on rebellion. This same Lamb is going to come back as King of kings and Lord of lords, and when He rules in righteousness via a scepter of “iron”, there is not going to be any way to charge this King with a lack of love—not the one who also went to the cross on our behalf.

Do you understand the application? No one is ever going to be able to accuse the Lamb of God, who took away the sins of the World by receiving them unto Himself, with being unloving; and this holds true even when He is in the midst of exercising judgment!

Many asked, after our study of the Great White Throne Judgment, about the hopelessness associated with this judgment. In other words, if there is no chance before the Great White Throne to actually prove an adequate level of righteousness from our own works, or to find one's name in the Book of Life—why does God go through with it? Why play out the drama when it always ends the same way?

First—it shows us that God is just—He is giving the condemned their last chance to show they do not deserve eternal separation. But there is a deeper reason as well. God is showing us ahead of time the absolute futility of going our own way. In other words, there is no future in rejecting His provision so that we can squeeze out our so-called independence for a little while longer. This hopeless end is meant to cause us to reconsider *in the present*, and accept what the love of God has offered.

Do you see how completely incongruous it is to castigate the love of God because He won't love us on our terms? It is much more appropriate to stand in awe that the grace of God is available to even one such as you or me! Once we understand this, it has application toward those around us. For example, it helps us understand our role:

*It is not our task to tell people what they want to hear;
we must tell them what in some sad future time they
would wish they had heard.* (L. Andrewes)

This is just another way of saying what we can also read in the Scriptures:

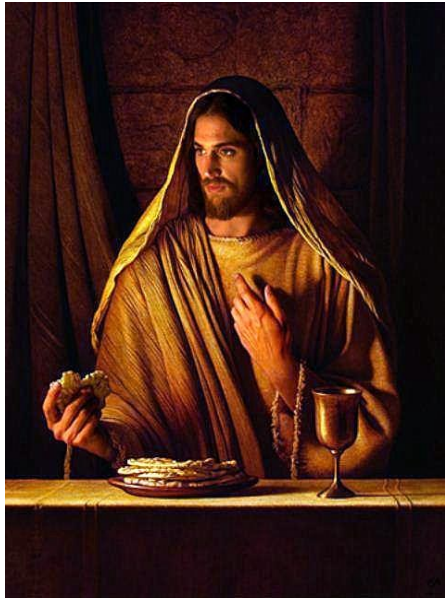
Christ's love compels me. . . it is as if God were making His appeal through us. . . be reconciled to God. II Corinthians 5:14,20

This is a burden that should be carried by every Christian!

Recalling the Lessons

In closing our study of prophecy, let me suggest one way that you can regularly recall what we have learned and be encouraged in hope, purified in conduct, and confident in what is to come. Consider with me the words of the communion remembrance detailed in I Corinthians 11:24-26:

"Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you. . . This cup is the new covenant in My blood, drink it. . . do this in remembrance of Me. "



We begin by remembering the past. When Christ hung on the cross, the sin of every member of the human race who will ever live was poured out on Him, and He was judged for them! He received in Himself, the punishment that we deserved.

And as a result, that judgment which was demanded by the character of a perfectly righteous and just Father was satisfied. The Son's work was so completely satisfactory to the Father that He raised Him from the dead—first to be seen by many, and then to be ascended to the right hand of the Father—the place of honor. In the meantime, He has poured out His Spirit that we might be His witnesses to a lost and dying world.

As often as you do this. . .

As those who live after the cross, we live during the time of the Church—that mystery that was hidden for ages and generations, but is now revealed. We are His Body, He is the Head, and He has work for us to do. The gates of hell will not prevail against the plans and purposes of God. In fact, we are to put on display the Wisdom of God—through the Church—in the heavenly realms! He has made our bodies a temple of the Holy Spirit, and Christ in us is the hope of glory—who else but our God has ever done such a thing? What a privilege to live and minister as part of the Church, and what a great calling we have received to be His ambassadors and His witnesses to those who are perishing!

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ,
as though God were pleading through us:
we implore you on Christ's behalf,
be reconciled to God.*

II Cor. 5:20



**For whenever you do this. . . you proclaim
the Lord's death until He comes. . .**

Our action as witnesses for Christ in the present should most certainly be connected to our understanding of the future! For in this calling we want to be found faithfully laboring until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and then He will return to take His Bride to Himself, that where He is we may be also. We will receive a resurrection body that is like His glorious body—death will be destroyed, our lives will be lovingly and justly evaluated before His Mercy Seat, we will take our place at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and then reign with Him.

Do you see what the Communion remembrance invites us to do? It not only invests time—past, present, and future with meaning—but it should cause us to reflect upon all that God is doing through His people. It should cause us to think about what it means to be a part of the Church in the present, what has gone before in the past, and what is yet to come associated with Christ's certain return in the future. The Communion remembrance should remind us of the great redemptive plan of God and thrill us with that fact that we have a part in it. This, in turn, prepares us to represent Him to those otherwise without hope and without eternal life.

Our study of prophecy has given us a framework by which we are caught up in the plans and purposes of the Sovereign Creator of the universe, who has offered a so-great salvation and given us a part in proclaiming it to the ends of the earth.

**Praise God that our God is One
who makes known the end
from the beginning!**



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