

WHERE ARE WE II?
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INTRO: Last Sunday we looked at the subject of where we are in time, where we are regarding truth, and where we are regarding the spiritual world. We believe we are in the days of Matthew 24:4-8. And we are experiencing some of the discomfort brought about by this time of early birth pangs. We are convinced by the prophetic Word of God that very soon Christ will come for His own and we want to look at that this morning.

With regard to truth, we find ourselves in a time when truth means very little. By and large we are rejecting truth as it relates to very obvious things. By and large, this rejection of truth affects in particular, morality.

With regard to the spiritual realm, demonic forces are ramping up. We are opening more and more doors for them to enter and to gain much more control over people. I warn every parent, be careful what you buy for your children, and especially in books and videos. Spiritual attacks abound on every hand.

But this morning we have better news. Our question is, where are we with regard to Christ's coming for His own? And then, in light of where we are, how should we then live?

IV. REGARDING CHRIST'S RETURN

Where are we with regard to Christ's coming? We see His coming as in two phases. This is new to many. But there are two aspects to His coming. These two cannot be put together as referring to one coming. For those who are new to this, I include what I have given numerous other times on the backside of the outlines you received. When Christ came the first time, the Jews expected a King. That is what they still expect today. Most Jews do not think He has come once already. They never expected Him to come as a suffering Messiah.

Today, the majority of churches do not see Christ as coming for the Church first, to take her to heaven, and then coming to earth to rule for 1,000 years. For the majority of churches, the unfulfilled prophecies of the OT prophets will never happen. The Church has replaced Israel. But we

can rest assured, as Jesus said, not one jot or tittle would pass from the law until all is fulfilled. It will all be fulfilled. God said in the prophets that He would gather the Jews out of the nations and make them a nation again. This happened in 1948. The time is coming, as is prophesied by Isaiah, when the wolf and the lamb will feed together. The OT prophecies will be fulfilled just as they are given.

We can say the same for the NT. So where are we with regard to Christ's coming for the Church? We go to that well familiar passage to us, 1 Thessalonians 4. We'll read verses 13-18.

13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 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.

17 Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Now look at the words "caught up" in verse 16. The Lord will descend from heaven. The dead in Christ will rise first. Then those who are alive and remain will be caught up together with those who were dead. They are caught up into the clouds. The words translated "caught up" are the words from which we get the word *rapture*.

Now I want you to look at verse 18, "Therefore, comfort one another with these words." Paul had taught the Thessalonians that Jesus would return and catch up the believers to be with Him. The Thessalonians were saddened that some of their folk had already passed away. They understood this to mean that they had missed out on being caught up. But Paul says, "No, they won't miss out. They will go first! And then those who remain alive will be caught up with them!"

If that should happen in our day, all truly born again Christians will be caught up and be gone! That is a teaching that is to the unbelieving world as outlandish as telling Noah to build a huge ship on dry land! But Paul says, "We say this to you by the Word of the Lord!"

May I ask you, where did the Lord say this? Turn to Matthew 24. I know that even many pretribulational teachers do not agree with what I see this passage as teaching. But I believe here is what Paul was referring to when he said: "We say this to you by the Word of the Lord."

In the last message I very briefly covered Matthew 24:1-30. In verses 4-31 Jesus has answered their first question: When will these things be? Now, as I understand this chapter, He begins to answer, "And what will be the sign or Your coming? So we go to verse 31 and on:

32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near.

33 "So you also, when you see all these things, (remember, it is when you see all these things begin to come to pass) know that it is near – at the doors!

34 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

37 "But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

38 "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

39 "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

In the days of Noah, people were carrying on life with no expectation that what God had told Noah would happen, would actually happen. No doubt they mocked this man who built a huge ship on dry land. And finally God called Noah to enter the ark and it says, "The Lord shut him in." That means the rest were shut out. And it began to rain, but it was too late for all the rest of mankind. No doubt they scrambled higher and higher. Parents tried to save children. Mothers clung to babies, but all to no avail. It was too late.

How will it be when Christ comes for His own? Just like that. Just as in Noah's day they lived as if nothing of what Noah said would ever happen. But in one day everything changed. It began to rain and never quit until all of mankind had drowned. And for a lost world, it was too late.

Just before the flood came, the Lord shut Noah in and the ark bore them up over the flooded earth. When Christ comes for the Church, it will be the Lord that catches up His Church. Those who have passed away will be caught up first, as Paul told the concerned Thessalonians, and then all living believers will undergo a change, according to 1 Corinthians 15, and they will be caught up too.

Paul said, "I say this to you by the Word of the Lord." So let us read that word now in verses 40-42:

40 "Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.

41 "Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

42 "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

The disciples second question was, "What will be the sign of Your coming? Jesus answer is: "When you see all these things begin to come to pass then you know His coming is near." Well, verses 4-8 are the beginning of these things.

But the warning is this: You do not know what hour your Lord is coming. What does that mean? It means be ready at all times. Here is what it will be like. As in the days of Noah, they were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage, and suddenly, the flood began. It was too late to prepare.

And the Word of the Lord is:

40 "Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.

41 "Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

This, I believe, is the great catching up. Now turn to 1 Thessalonians 1. When Paul went to Thessalonica he taught them about the coming of Christ and the great catching up.

5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

6 ¶ And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.

9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Now here is the question, this salvation, this deliverance from the wrath to come; what is that? Turn to the book of Revelation. We might think the wrath to come refers to hell but hell is not referred to as the wrath to come. Revelation 6:6-19 deal exclusively with the tribulation. So look at 6:16:

Re 6:16 and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the **wrath** of the Lamb!"

Here is the wrath to come. It is the tribulation and the time of God's wrath. It is this time that will now shortly come on the world. It is this that Paul taught the Thessalonians they would be delivered from.

Verse 17:

Re 6:17 "For the great day of His **wrath** has come, and who is able to stand?"

Re 11:18 The nations were angry, and Your **wrath** has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth."

Re 14:8 And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the **wrath** of her fornication."

Re 14:10 "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the **wrath** of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Re 14:19 So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it* into the great winepress of the **wrath** of God.

Re 15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the **wrath** of God is complete.

Re 15:7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the **wrath** of God who lives forever and ever.

Re 16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the **wrath** of God on the earth."

Re 16:19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His **wrath**.

Re 18:3 "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the **wrath** of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."

Re 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and **wrath** of Almighty God.

These references speak of the wrath to come. And Paul taught the Thessalonians that they would be saved from this time. Now let me draw another picture for you. Let us say that the Christian was to go through this time and Christ would come for the believer in the middle or at the end of this time? What would Paul have taught the Thessalonians? Would he have taught them about the one who delivers us from the wrath to come?

Revelation 2-3 addresses the Church age. A number of promises are made to the believer. Listen to this promise in Revelation 3:10:

Re 3:10 "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the **hour** of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

This is the blessed hope of the believer. Now listen to Luke 21:8:

28 "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

Do you know how blessed the hope of the Christian is? Here is what some teach. The tribulation will be here soon. It is highly likely that if you do not deny the faith, before the middle of the tribulation you will be dead, unless you know how to keep yourself in that time. So you need to

stock up on gold or silver. You need to have a supply of groceries. It would be best if you could be on a farm somewhere where the government does not have much access to you. You need to stock up ammunition to hunt for yourself and take care of yourself. The most, dire time this world has ever known is almost upon us.

I have a book in my library called, "Christians Will Go Through the Tribulation." Half of the book is the theology to support this view, and the other half is about how to survive the tribulation. Now listen to Paul: "Now you Thessalonians, wait patiently for the Lord Jesus Christ. He will deliver you from the wrath to come." Now listen to 4:18, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words of the great catching up."

Now look at the very next words in 1 Thessalonians 5:

- 1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.
- 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.
- 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.
- 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.
- 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.
- 6 ¶ Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober.
- 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.
- 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation.
- 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.
- 11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Oh what a blessed hope is ours! I have great sympathy for Christians who go to church and are not taught what the Bible prophecies about the future. We are in the closing

day of the Church age and we are to rejoice in the Lord. The Lord has not left us for destruction. He will save us, from the wrath to come. For, verse 9 says, God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation. Salvation from what? The wrath of God!

V. REGARDING LIFE IN LIGHT OF WHERE WE ARE?

A. Titus 2:11-14

So in light of all we see around us; in light of woke and cancel culture and climate change, pandemics, and wars and rumors of wars; in light of confusion on every hand, in light of untrustworthy news media, in light of gender issues, in light of so much unknown, how then should we live?

Well, with regard to Christ's soon return, we should live like the Thessalonians, so that our faith would be spoken of throughout our area. We should comfort and edify one another. Our hope should not be in government. Our hope can never safely be in man in any way, shape, or form. Our hope is in God.

Turn to Titus 2. We'll begin in verse 11:

11 ¶ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

How should we live? We should deny ungodliness and worldly desires. We should live soberly, righteously, and godly. We should be looking for the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. He saved us to redeem us from lawless deeds and to purify for Himself a special people who about with zeal for good works! This is how to live.

B. Proverbs 3:5-6

Turn now to what will be a familiar passage to many of you, Proverbs 3:5-6. I am giving these two messages by way of reminder. We have been reminded of where we are in time; where we are with regard to the truth; where we are with regard to the spiritual battle we are in; and where we are in light of Christ's coming for His Church. And we are now looking at how we should live in light of all this.

Verse 5:

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Trust in the LORD, that is Jehovah God! Trust Him! Do you worry about this pandemic and what lies in the future? It causes concern for us, but here is the question: Do I trust in the Lord? Do I rest my concerns with the Lord? What is worry? Worry means I have a concern and I cannot see my way through. I think it may all turn out bad, but I haven't got the wherewithal to deal with it. So my mind is like the troubled waters of the sea, driven once one way, and the next, the other way. What is the problem? I cannot see my way through. As soon as I can work things out, my worries cease. But I am not trusting God. I am my own deliverer.

The proverb says, "Trust in the LORD." It is when we don't know how things will turn out that we need to trust the Lord. We need to surrender to let Him and trust Him to take care of our concerns in His way, not our way. Now look what it says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart." What does that mean? My heart can trust? The word *heart* is used figuratively, that is, it does not speak of the literal heart. What it refers to is the mind. I am to trust the Lord with my entire mind. This is the very place where worry happens if I don't trust.

Well, the thinking part of the mind is most crucial. What is it that worries us? It is always something future. God has foretold us many things. But most of the future as it relates to our daily lives is not foretold. Here we have to learn to trust God by faith.

Someone said worry helps because most of the things we worry about never happen. At times huge concerns overwhelm us and we worry. It is then that we need to go to the Lord and place our trust in Him. We are to trust God with all our mind. That means we need to store His word in our mind so that in the time of trouble, we can go into our mind and pull out a promise and dwell on it. One of the greatest things one can do is to learn to know God. And how we do that is by learning to know His attributes from the Bible, like He is holy, just, good, all-knowing and many more.

Trust in the Lord with all your mind. Now listen to the next words, "and lean not on your own understanding." When do we worry? When our own understanding cannot figure out how to handle some present concern. As long as we can figure out how we might do something, we don't get so concerned.

Years ago Prairie Bible Institute was sued for \$9,000.00. It was a sum beyond their hope of obtaining. And one board member said, "Thank God it is so much, now we'll have to trust God to take care of it." What he is saying is that as long as our crafty mind can figure out some way, we are not driven to trust.

God has to allow a lot of circumstances into our lives to teach us to trust Him. As long as we can manage and manipulate things to our benefit, we have a hard time trusting in the Lord. So time and again we have to be driven to trust by things we cannot handle with our understanding. I have pondered again and again the truth that without faith it is impossible to please God.

Then the proverb says, "In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths." How do we acknowledge Him in all our ways? Well, what are our ways? They are our paths, all that we do as we go forward in life. As we go forward in life, we are to acknowledge Him in it all. The word translated "acknowledge" is the Hebrew word *to know*.

One dictionary said of the word to acknowledge, that it is to recognize the rights, authority or status of someone. Listen to some cross references to this word:

Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.

Pslam 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;

24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.

In order to experience the grace of God we must find favor in His sight and we can only find favor in His sight if we live by faith. So what are we to do in the days in which we live now? We may go into change after change in days ahead, and how are we to live? The same way Christians should always have lived in the past!

C. Habakkuk 3:17-18

Turn to Habakkuk 3. Verses 17-18 are good verses to know in such times as we live in today. In a message I did some years ago I said this: "Habbakuk lived in a time of national and spiritual depression. In our country and in the North American church we also face both a national and spiritual decline. In Habakkuk's day, the law was powerless and justice was lacking; wickedness abounded on every hand and there was no fear of God. And Habbakuk, a prophet, could see the handwriting on the wall; Judah would be punished by God. And so Habbakuk, like many other prophets, found himself in circumstances that any prophet would dread. But Habakkuk, no matter how dark things got, was not going to let those circumstances rob him of his joy in the Lord."

Habakkuk wrote probably about 20 years before the southern kingdom went into captivity. That captivity would change Israel forever. And in light of the dark days ahead, these verses say this:

17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail,

And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls—

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

In verse 17 we have all the adverse circumstances in the world around Habakkuk. It is a dark picture. But then Habakkuk says that even though all this might happen, he would rejoice in the Lord, he would joy in the God of His salvation.

So we might say that no matter what happens in the future, I will rejoice in the Lord. This is Jehovah God. When justice has fled from our law courts; God remains just. When lies are spread all over, God remains true. Though everything around me changes, God never changes. Though the storms of life rage, God is still a God of peace. Study the God of our salvation in any which way you want, you will only find goodness.

When troubles want to overwhelm, think of the Creator. In six days the whole universe was in place! Think about the fact that He is all-knowing, and that you don't lose a single hair without Him knowing it. Who knows what will befall us this year? Nobody knows. So what can we do about it?

Well, we can fill our minds with God. We can read His Word. We can put into our minds that which will help us in time of trouble. We can rejoice in who God is and what He will do. We know the big picture of the future. We know this world will never get better on its own. We know things will get worse. We know that the love of many will wax cold. We know that this world is preparing for something big. We know the antichrist is coming. We know we are being prepared for a one world government. God's Word tells us these things.

But we are convinced that the Lord will deliver His people from the wrath to come, just like He delivered Noah and His family in the flood. So we can rejoice in the Lord. If I do not rejoice in Him, I do not know

Him very well. So our text says, in all your ways, know Him! Yes, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

No Prime Minister, no president, no world leader can change who God is, or ultimately withstand our God. He is Lord! And our Lord is waiting for the signal, and when it comes, with delight He will go to the home of His bride, the Church and He will take her home to His Father's house where He has prepared places to stay for them while the tribulation rolls on earth. And then, what He has in store for the Church, will make the trials of this life pale in comparison.

D. Philippians 4:4-7

Now go to one more favorite passage in Philippians 4. Paul speaks more of rejoicing in Philippians than he does anywhere else. We begin in verse 4:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

I am thinking in particular of verses 6-7. First, be anxious for nothing. The word for anxious is *merimnao*. We have legitimate cares, things that fall to our responsibility. Paul talks about his care for all the churches. We have the daily cares of life. We may have specific responsibilities in the church and so on. These are legitimate cares.

But then there are the cares of things in the future. When there are those things we worry about, they want to consume our mind. It is right here we are to learn to trust God. So Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing, but..." And then comes the instruction of what to do in such cases. In everything, by prayer and supplication,

with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

We are to make our requests or our petitions known to God. And we might say, "Is He not all-knowing? Why do we need to let our requests be made known to Him? Like faith, asking God for things keeps us in our position. If God gave us all we desired without any requirement on our part, we would all go to hell. But when we make our requests known to Him, he might say, no. If we pray in humility we will trust that He knows better than we do. Our children might ask us for things and we know it is better for them not to have those things. God's wisdom exceeds ours to such an extent that we must humble ourselves and trust Him with the answers.

So we are to let our requests be made known by prayer. We bow ourselves before Him, showing that we are dependent on Him. This is general prayer. Someone has recommended the name of the book of Acts as a way to pray. I use this very often. Our praying in general should be much more than just asking. So, first is A, adoration. Here is worship. It is bowing before God and adoring Him. I do this by remembering some specific attributes of God. I have become so grateful that I learned to pray without beginning and ending by asking for things. The more attributes of God one knows, the greater one's worship becomes.

Then the C is for confession. Confession of anything that needs confessing, but here I generally acknowledge my need of Him. I know I need Him. The older I get the more I need Him.

The T is for thanksgiving. This should be a daily practice. Oh how it puts things in perspective when you stop to tell God what you are thankful for. If one does not have much to be thankful for, one is quite self-sufficient. One does not need God much.

And last then is the S, and here is supplication; asking for specific things. So Paul says we are to make our requests known by supplication. There we have specific praying. We name what it is we desire specifically.

And when we obey this, Paul says:

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Oh what a wonderful thing when the peace of God comes.

Listen to 1 Peter 5:6-7:

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

When we pray we place ourselves under the mighty hand of God. We recognize our place. And when we put ourselves there, then at the right time, he will exalt us. He knows when and what is best. And there, under His mighty hand we are to cast all our cares, merimna on Him, whether they be our legitimate responsibilities or the worries that want to consume our mind.

And why should we do this? Because He, God Almighty, cares for us. The word for care here is different. He does not worry about us, he cares, in the sense that we care for our children or our friends. He cares about us. I ask you, are you a Christian? If so, then I ask, does God care about you? And the answer is right here, yes He cares about you. He cares about me. So for that reason we should humble ourselves under His mighty hand and cast all our cares upon Him.

And how do I know when I have given them to Him? When I don't have them anymore.

CONCL: So where are we in light of the Lord's coming for His own? Jesus said, "Lift up your heads, your redemption draws near when you see all these things begin to come to pass." Like the bride who was waiting for the bridegroom, she knew that at any time she would hear the words: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming!" Just so, we know His coming is near, even at the doors.

So how should we live in light of all this? We ought to be about the Lord's work. In light of all that is happening we ought to trust in the Lord and not lean on our own understanding. We

ought to acknowledge Him in all our ways and if we do He will direct our paths.

And if things go wrong, shutdowns continue, uncertainties abound, we ought to learn to rejoice in the God of our salvation and He will make us sure-footed when everything seems shaky. We ought to be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, let our requests be made known to God. And then, in the midst of it all, His peace will mount guard over our minds and stand there like a watchman.

We ought to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and cast all our cares upon Him, because He cares, He really cares for us.