

Eternal Judgement 4

Eschatology

Eschatology, the study of end times, is one of the most debated topics in Christianity. Many believers hold different positions on this and sadly it has divided the Church unnecessarily. These differences are typically to do with the timing of the “rapture” and which aspects of the last days are symbolic and which ones should be taken literally. Another major area of contention is to do with the nature of the great tribulation and the role of the Church and Israel in that time. Nevertheless, it is important for us to know what the Bible actually says about these things and not to become sensationalist based on the latest conspiracy theory, novel or movie we have watched on the topic. It’s crucial for us to rightly divide the Word of God and remember to interpret it based on what the author was saying to the initial recipients, the historical context and also in alignment with other passages that may be clearer. Sometimes we have an inflated view of the importance of our own generation that we assume everything written will manifest in our day. In philosophy people speak of the teleological question. This is to do with where we are ultimately going. *Teleios* is the Greek for “brought to its end, complete or finished.” The teleological question is to do with ultimate destination and how things will end. In essence, how will this earth as we know it, be wrapped up? In this message we will be answering some key questions to do with last things. These are questions that even the disciples asked Jesus. *Mt 24:3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”*

Bill Scheidler, one of our mentors, states that *“The word “eschatology” comes from two Greek words, eschatos meaning “last in time or place” and logos meaning “word or discourse.” Literally the word “eschatology” means “words about the last things.” From a theological point of view, “eschatology” refers to that branch of theology that deals with the last or final things. It usually refers to some of the following: 1. The last days leading up to the return of Christ and the associated events. 2. The second coming of Christ itself. 3. The final judgment of the living and the dead. 4. The millennial kingdom and the eternal state.”* With regards to how we view Old Testament prophecies that might have an effect on the Last Days I like something stated by Dr. Steve Lemke in an article he writes building a case for a mid-tribulation rapture; *“Old Testament prophecies will be viewed as having meaning within their own historical setting, but these prophecies may have a dual fulfillment or be typologically duplicated in later events. Greater predictive weight will be given to passages so understood by New Testament writers”.* He goes on to say something that I think is of paramount importance as we study eschatology; *“Biblical interpreters should put themselves under the authority of Scripture, rather than to impose an external agenda or pattern upon it. Therefore, this study will not impose the interpretive framework of any particular millennial view on Scripture, but will allow Scripture to speak for itself.”*

1. What does the Bible say about the Second Coming of Christ?

a) There are specific things that will happen to creation itself.

Luke 21:25-28 25 “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Rom 8:20-21 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Mark 13:24-25 But in those days, following that distress, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

Acts 2:19-21 I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Mt 24:7b There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

b) There will be signs in the political and world systems.

Mt 24:6-7a You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

Dan 12:4 But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.

c) There will be signs in the anxiety levels of mankind.

Luke 21:25-26 "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

d) There will be signs in the religious world.

False prophecy

Mt 24:23-27 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. 26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

False miracles

Mark 13:22-23 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

Persecution

Luke 21:12-15 "But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13 And so you will bear testimony to me. 14 But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

Betrayal

Mark 13:12-13 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Tribulation and pressure

Mark 13:9 You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

Mark 13:19-20 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. 20 “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

e) The Gospel will be preached to all nations and the church will be glorious

Mt 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Is 2:2-3 In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. “The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

I like to see this scripture as referring to the Church in the last days although others might see it as God’s promise to Israel.

2. Are things going to get better or worse as we approach the end?

a) Some things are going to get worse.

The love of many will grow cold.

Mt 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold..

There will be a great apostasy (falling away)

2 Thess 2:3 Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

It is not clear whether this is speaking of general rebellion or specifically talking about church people falling away.

Many will be deceived by demonically inspired teachings.

1 Tim 4:1-2 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

2 Tim 3:13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Wickedness will come to full fruit.

Rev 22:11 Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.

b) Some things are going to get better.

The Church will be glorious and victorious.

Eph 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

There will be a great harvest.

Rev 14:14-16 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man[a] with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

There will be a great outpouring of the Spirit of God.

Joel 2:28 – 32 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. 30 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance,

The spirit and power of Elijah will be restored.

Mal 4:5-6 "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

3. What are the major eschatological viewpoints in relation to the Millennium?

Rev 20:1-6 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. 4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

It's important to note that all millennial and tribulational views are based upon a particular set of hermeneutical presuppositions which inform those perspectives.

a) Amillennialism

This is the view that the 2nd Coming of Christ concludes God's plan for man on the earth. The 1000 year reign is viewed as symbolic. They do not expect a future physical reign of 1000 years but see it as Christ's reign with his saints between His two comings.

2 Peter 3:8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

1000 in the Bible is seen as a number of opposition to darkness in biblical numerology. 1000 is also a prophetic period not a literal one. Amillennialism views this period as an indefinite time speaking of the Church Age. In this view, the rapture takes place in conjunction with the 2nd Coming of Christ. One of the scriptures used to support this view is *Mt 12:28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* Amillennialism also emphasises the hidden nature of the Kingdom of God based on *Luke 17: 20-21 Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst.*

Amillennialism holds the view that Christ will return after the Church Age and conduct the final judgement followed by the establishment of a new heaven and new earth. A lot of the Reformed Church, Mennonites, Churches of Christ, protestants, Roman Catholics hold this view. Augustinian eschatology is amillennial.

b) Post-millennial

In this view, Christ will not return until the Kingdom of God is fully established on earth. The Gospel will gradually overcome all opposing forces in the world until the kingdoms of this world become reformed to reflect God's patterns and way of operating. Some believe that this will be a slow process that could take an indefinite amount of time whilst others believe that it could take place in a few years as a result of a great revival. All postmillennialists believe that the current age is the Kingdom. Some believe that the millennial phase of the Kingdom is present whilst others hold that it is in the future when the world has been Christianised. This view emphasizes the victorious church and the power of the Gospel in social influence. They believe that the Church is the agent through which the world will return to "Eden" as it were. Some have criticised this view as placing too much emphasis on man's ability whilst disregarding God's sovereignty and intervention. It is important to note that there are degrees of post millennial thinking. There are two major types of post millenniums, Pietistic Postmillennialism which denies that the advance of the Kingdom involves the total transformation of culture through Biblical law and Theonomic postmillennialism which affirms this. (Theo = God and Nomos = Law.) The emphasis here is typically to have Old Testament laws embedded in modern civil society. Many consider themselves conservative post-millennials whilst others fall into various categories of dominionism. Dominionism is the belief that Christians are obligated to rise to power so that nations are ruled by God's Word. Soft dominionism will recognise that if a nation is Christian it should abide by Christian values and laws whilst hard dominionism is the belief that only Christians should hold political office and that one should not vote for non-Christians. A lot of post millenniums are proponents of Christian Reconstructionism which is the belief that all Christians should strive to dominate in their fields to God's glory. Essentially dominionism is about Christians being in charge of all spheres of society. Some of the arguments against dominionism suggest that the dominion mandate is to do with our dominion over the earth and animals and not over other people, yet many use it to dominate others. There has been concern that hard dominionism can lead to violence, totalitarianism, and Christian nationalism. The danger of some of the extremes lies in how we interpret what a godly government looks like. Some focus on the Mosaic law whilst others apply cultural centric approaches that might not be clear in scripture. I believe that God wants our primary focus to be to make disciples by getting people saved. As they grow in the Word, they should apply biblical principles in their spheres of influence. We see that this was Jesus' emphasis. When the disciples wanted to enforce his rule physically, He restrained them from this. In fact, they were called to honour emperors who were not godly. As people become Christians who are truly discipled and as God promotes them, society will naturally be transformed. The Kingdom of God starts with the internal then works itself out externally. I do believe that there is a biblical view of politics and business and I have written extensively on these subjects. The issue here is to do with how these are enforced, what we prioritize and in what order it occurs; the preaching of the Gospel or societal change. In an article written by Russ Vought he states how Tim Keller intones that "*we must recognize that Christian Nationalism in its most pure form is indeed idolatrous. It looks to political power as the thing that will truly save us.*" Transforming society is part of our vision. We believe that when society applies biblical laws it will be a better society. I am glad that Christians like William Wilberforce were used by God to transform society and did not limit the Gospel to the four corners of the church building. At the same time, I am conscious of the fact that anything that becomes an "ism" and goes to extremes becomes dangerous.

c) Premillennial

Mt 24:29-31 "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'30 "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

1 Thess 4:17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

We will use the scriptures above to examine Premillennialism. This view holds the view that Christ will come again before the millennium. It is divided into 3 main views. Pre-tribulation, Mid-tribulation and Post-tribulation.

i) Pre-tribulation

This view holds that the Church will be raptured out before the tribulation at Christ's secret appearing. In the absence of the Church during the tribulation God will work through the Jewish nation to evangelize the world. Christ then returns at the end of the tribulation and ushers in the millennium. This is commonly viewed as dispensationalism where the Church and Israel are distinct. This view has been criticised for having a low view of the Church and dividing God's plan whilst minimizing the power of the cross. It also does not fully acknowledge the mysterious link between the Old Testament and New Testament and coming together of the Jews and Gentiles as one spiritual temple. Some people see it as having a defeatist mentality that undermines the power of the Church to transform society and overcome the enemy or even face persecution. Dr Steve Lemke states that *"The radically futurist interpretation of Revelation made by pre-tribulationists makes the book of Revelation have virtually no meaning to the people of its day"*.

ii) Mid-tribulation

This view is the same as the one above except that the Church is raptured half-way through the tribulation. One of the differences between the pre-tribulation dispensationalists and the mid-tribulationists is to do with their interpretation of Israel and the Church. For mid-tribulationists, the church is best understood as being included in those that the Lord in the eschatological discourse warns will experience tribulation. Another difference is that the mid-tribulationists believe that believers are not exempt from tribulation, but they will not experience the wrath of God. As a result, they differentiate between tribulation and the Great Tribulation. They also acknowledge that the 3.5 years could be symbolic or literal. This view believes that understanding the rapture as being described in Rev. 14 is more consistent with the hermeneutical principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture than seeing it as Rev 4:1. Post-millennialists will also argue that God calling John up (Rev 4:1) is not synonymous with all believers being raptured.

iii) Post-tribulation

Proponents of this view such as Irvin Baxter contend that the rapture and the Second Coming of Christ are the same event. If you examine the passages above, they view 1 Thess 4:17 (harpazo – caught up) as the same event as Mt 24: 29-31. Of course others will argue that they need to reconcile the differences between these passages instead of just focusing on the similarities. This perspective holds the Church in high regard when it comes to overcoming evil during the tribulation. The passage below will often be used to emphasize this.

Mt 16:18-19 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Post-tribulation theologians point out that the pre-tribulation view compromises the integrity of some scriptures when they interpret being kept during persecution as being raptured. They highlight that it is possible to be in tribulation and kept without necessarily being raptured as seen in Revelation 12 when the woman runs away from the Dragon. Nevertheless, many oppose this view stating that it suggests that believers will suffer being on earth while God's wrath is poured out. They feel that this view does not adequately distinguish between tribulation and God's wrath.

Conclusion

Today we focused on eschatology examining key questions around the second coming of Christ. Next week we will answer specific questions such as: 1. What will be the state of our resurrection bodies? 2. Who is the Antichrist? 3. Why would a loving God send people to hell?

Acknowledgements

Bill Scheidler Basic Doctrine 2 (Lesson 21-24 – Doctrine of Eschatology pgs 94-116)