

This final message of the series looks at the greater framework of God's program for the future. The study of "last things" or "eschatology" is not without debate. Certain beliefs, common to evangelicalism, distinguish it from liberalism and many Christian sects and cults, though they are under attack from within. Common beliefs have included the personal, physical return of Jesus Christ in glory and power, the continued existence of each person after death and the resurrection of the body either to judgment or to glorious, eternal life.

Among evangelicals there are still significant differences, often connected to one's understanding of how Scripture is to be interpreted. Whether in agreement or differing with one another, we should remember Peter's challenge in regard to future things: "what kind of people ought you to be?" (2 Peter 3:11)

### **I. *The coming of the Messiah in glory and power***

1. The coming of the Messiah in glory and power has been prophesied throughout the OT and NT, e.g., Ps 2:9 & Is. 11:1-5.

Though His coming in glory and power seemed to contradict the prophecies of suffering and rejection, we see resolution in the NT through two comings. Cf. Luke 4:16-19 with Isaiah 61:1-2ff. Jesus first came gently and humbly (Zech. 9:9; Mt 21:5) with the prophesied credentials of the Messiah (Luke 7:22; Isaiah 35:5, 6). He promised that He would come again in glory and power (John 14:3; Mt 24:30; cf. Acts 1:11; Phil. 3:20).

2. The nature of His future coming has been clearly prophesied in those promises: visibly with signs in the heavens (Mt 24:30), personally & physically (Acts 1:11; Zech 14:4), powerfully & gloriously (Mt 24:30-31; Mk 13:26-27; Rev 19:14), and unexpectedly (Mt 24:36).

Therefore, Jesus says that we should be watchful (Mark 13:25-27, 34). We should be diligent like a servant expecting the return of his master. The apostle Paul writes that as we anticipate the return of Jesus Christ, we will say "no" to sin, be self-controlled, and live upright and godly (Titus 2:11-13). John says, that we should want to "be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2:28 NIV)

### **II. *The resurrection and the earthly rule of Jesus Christ with His saints***

1. Evangelicals accept that in some way Jesus will rule over the earth and at some time all the dead will be resurrected because of Scripture such as Isaiah 9:7, Jer. 23:5-6 and Mt 25:31-32a. But they differ in their understanding how this looks and when it will occur.
2. These differences are generally classed according to their understanding of the 1,000 year reign of Christ in Revelation 19:11-20:6. Differences in principles of interpretation are a large factor. The result is largely three different understandings: (1) Christ returns after the church gradually establishes a "kingdom", i.e., the post-millennial view; (2) Christ reigns now spiritually, there will be no physical kingdom on earth, i.e., the a-millennial view; (3) Christ will return prior to a literal, 1,000 reign on earth, i.e., the pre-millennial view.
3. Another difference concerns the nature and timing of the resurrection: some see only one general, physical resurrection; others, generally of the pre-millennial view, believe that the physical resurrection of the righteous and that of the wicked are separated by the thousand year reign of Christ (cf. Rev. 20:5).
4. Further differences include one's understanding of the prophesied period of great tribulation (Dan 12:1; Mt 24:21), the nature of the figure called the Anti-Christ, and the nature and timing of the Christ's calling His own to be with Him (1 Thess 4:16-17). Most of the pre-millennial view understand the great tribulation as a limited period immediately preceding the return of Christ, but they differ regarding the timing of the "rapture". There are yet other differences among evangelicals regarding their understanding of the future.

Although these last points of difference are still significant, they are beyond the scope of a review. But how one views the reign of Christ on earth, i.e., the millennium, will make an essential difference in how one lives now. Our "blessed hope" is "the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13) and not our efforts to make this world a better place. Only when Jesus appears will all things be put right. We still should do good, as children of God and citizens of the kingdom, and we may even be persecuted for it. We should indeed prepare for persecution, whether or not the church goes through the great tribulation. Tragically, it will generally get worse and worse until Jesus returns.

### **III. *Final judgment and the new heavens and new earth***

There will be a judgment of the works of those who are in Christ (2 Cor 5:10) and there will be a judgment of the unrighteous (Rev 20:11-15). Eventually all that opposed God will be judged. Everything must be brought into a proper place of submission to God the Father.

1. Christ must abolish all other rule or authority and power, including the defeat of both human governments and all spiritual forces (e.g., Satan). The last enemy to be abolished is death (1 Cor 15:26; Rev 20:14).
2. Then Christ will deliver the kingdom to God. Christ will continue to rule as part of the Godhead, because God will then live among men (Rev 21:3).
3. The rule of God over men will continue into eternity in a new heaven and a new earth.

The end result is "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28) and that He may receive His deserved glory. Peter answers his own question concerning the difference it makes for us: "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." (2 Pet 3:11-12 NIV). We should purify ourselves (1 John 3:2-3 NIV). We rightly look forward to that coming day, but it should change how we live, how we minister (e.g., 2 Tim 4:1-2), and how we relate to one another (e.g., 1 Th 4:18). The Biblical study of future things is not for our curiosity, but to change our lives now.