

The End of the World as We Know It

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Revelation 19:11-21:8

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This morning, it is a privilege to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Revelation 19. Now I know there are many of you here this morning who are here for the very first time, guests and visitors, not only are we honored to have you with us but we must share with you but you've actually come at the end of the journey. You say, "The end of the journey?" It was almost three years ago that we as a family of faith began a very unique journey, what would it look like just to walk through the scriptures one maybe two chapters a day, what would it look like to gather up on Sunday morning to reflect on those respective passages and to expound them together. Well, today what we know as that three year Bible reading plan has drawn to a close. This week we read the final chapters and today as we walk through chapters 19 through 21 of the book of Revelation, we're going to see that soon and very soon the end of the world as we know it shall occur.

Now as we open up to these passages, allow me to share with you that each and every one of the passages we're going to read this morning could very easily be study or a message in and of itself, in fact, if we were walking through just the book of Revelation, we would take these passages and make them an independent message, in fact, even if we were just studying prophecy in general, we would take these four passages and respectfully address them as an individual section. But today we're going to kind of fly over it 30,000 feet, we're going to see how is it that the Lord wraps everything up, how is it that he brings things to a conclusion, and you're going to see this morning that what we're about to read is very different than everything we hear from the world. Every suggestion, every idea, every philosophy that the world wants to show or share with us, the Lord is going to share with us this morning that it's going to be a little bit different, in fact, today we're going to begin in chapter 19 of the book of Revelation, beginning in verse 11, with what we know as the return of Jesus Christ. This is that time that you've heard about ti sung, we've talked about it in conversation, but there is a day coming where the sky is going to open up and Jesus Christ is physically going to return to the earth.

Verse 11 of chapter 19 it says,

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge

and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

We see in this passage a very different picture than those of us who grew up with a flannel board in Sunday school, do we not? It's a different picture of the Jesus who was healing the lame and walking across the water and he was multiplying the food, for in Revelation 19, we see not just his return but we see the fulfillment of the promise that he's been making for thousands of years, in fact, some of you may not realize this but when you walk through the Old Testament, for every passage you find with the first coming of Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection, for every one of those passages, there are eight passages about the Second Coming. It is one of the most prolific topics in all of the Bible and yet at the same time, it causes all kinds of debate and disdain and confusion even among the church, even among the believers, in fact, one of the jokes is when it comes to the Second Coming, you get two Baptists, you're going to get three opinions.

So allow me today to just simplify the promise that God made that he would return one day. Three very simple concepts here that you can help understand the Second Coming. 1. It's going to happen. You say, "What do you mean it's going to happen?" Well, in 1 Peter 5, it says in the last days there will be mockers who show up, there will be people who say, "He hasn't come back yet, you surely must be mistaken."

Allow me to illustrate. I want you to imagine today that you have a coin in your hand, that you flip that coin to decide if it be heads or tails. Let's say that it lands on heads, it's a 50/50 chance, right? Let's just say hypothetically that you take that same coin and you flip it 100 times and every single time out of 100 it lands on heads, what are the odds that it will land on tails the 101st time? 50/50. You see, oftentimes we look back at 2,000 years and say he hasn't returned as of yet, surely the odds must be diminishing. But remember what Jesus said in the gospel of Matthews, in the day that you think not of, that will be the day in which I return. In fact, the very idea that people dismiss the fact of the Second Coming ought to make us more readily attuned to the fact that it could literally be right around the corner.

1. It's going to happen. 2. In God's great calendar of events, it's next. Now I realize it's been 2,000 years, I get it, but the Bible also says that with the Lord a day as if a thousand years and a thousand years is as of a day, so to be quite honest with you, from God's perspective it's just been a weekend is all it's been. But in Acts 1, remember the disciples are huddled up, the Lord Jesus ascends into heaven and the angelic beings says, "Why do

you look up? Do you know that in the same manner that he departed, he shall one day return?"

And so even though we know it's going to happen, we know that it's next in God's great calendar of events, the third and most important thing is this: you can't predict it and neither can I, in fact, let me give you some wisdom. If you ever come across somebody who gives you the exact day, the exact time, the exact hour, number 1, turn them off, number 2, quit sending them money because they don't know. The Lord said not even the angels in heaven know the exact time of the return but here in Revelation 19, that which he's been promising eight times more than the first coming, has come to fruition.

Now you and I have a unique privilege when we talk about the Second Coming, when we read what we just read, there's wrath, there's judgment, there's that famous battle of Armageddon that commences after this, but I want you to notice the privilege we have. Look in verse 14, it says, "And the armies which were in heaven followed him." Now push pause there for just a moment. Your first thought is the angelic beings, of course, correct? But notice how they're adorned, "upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." Never do you see the angelic host described in this manner, in fact, who you see described in this manner are those individuals who've come to a place in their life just like we saw demonstrated earlier in this service, people of all ages and all backgrounds, all colors and of all languages, who understand that they have a sin problem, they realize they've rebelled against God, they've asked Jesus Christ to save them. You see, when we talk about the return of Jesus Christ, chapter 19, there's a lot of wrath, there's a lot of judgment but here's the great news: you can be on the proverbial other side, in fact, you can be those who are with him and not contrary to him.

Now when we use the phrase "Second Coming," oftentimes we describe the heavens opening up and the event we just read but chronologically there's a whole lot of stuff that's there. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 15, there is coming a day that in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, those who are dead in Christ, those who are alive in Christ, will be caught up together to be with the Lord, supernaturally we are raised to be with him. If we're going to come back with him, we've got to get up there, right? And even though there is great debate and discussion, we call this event or we label it the "rapture." Now I know that that English word "rapture" is technically not in your Bible but we derive it from the word which means "to be caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4. Later on in Acts 8 when Philip is witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch, as soon as he is baptized, he is caught up to another location, to another area, and when that occurs, the Bible says he is caught up much like we read in 1 Thessalonians 4. Why is this a privilege for us? Because the Bible says that when Jesus Christ returns in power and authority and judgment, rather than being the recipient of that judgment, we can actually be with him when he returns.

Now the second thing we need to see is found in chapter 20, that after Jesus returns, he will reign. Beginning in verse 1 it says,

1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. 4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

So the Bible speaks about the fact that Jesus Christ is going to return, and then in the very next chapter it says after he returns, he is going to reign on the earth. You may not realize how much of a fulfillment this is of Old Testament prophecies, in fact, in Psalm 110:1, King David, inspired by the Lord, says that one day the Messiah Jesus Christ will sit on his throne.

Now that's an intriguing prophecy, however, you might be surprised to find out that in the entirety of the New Testament, it is actually the most quoted verse in your New Testament from the Old Testament. In other words, more than any other thing that the Lord shares with us, he says one day Jesus Christ is going to reign on the earth and notice it says that Satan will be bound for a thousand years. Notice that it will be a time of peace and prosperity. Is this not what humanity is thriving for? Every time we have some type of, shall we say, presentation or competition where they interview young people who are talented and gifted and they say, "What is it that you desire more than anything?" What do they always say? World peace. Anytime that even those who we classify as dictators act out with aggression and wrath, you say, "Why would you do what you do?" Do you know what they always say? So we can establish world peace. You do realize that it is a multi-trillion dollar industry in our world today to somehow bring peace to the world and Jesus does it simply by sitting on his throne. In fact, in Isaiah 40 it says when he does this, that which is crooked shall be made straight.

Remember I mentioned the privilege that we have when he returns, you know there's a privilege of when he reigns. Notice it says at the very end of verse 6 that we shall reign with him. We have the privilege of serving alongside of him, in fact, numerous times in your Bible, Revelation 1 and 5 just to speak of two, say that the day is coming where believers in Jesus Christ will be as kings and priests and reign with the Lord – listen – on the earth. One of the most famous parables that Jesus Christ ever told is the parable of the talents in Matthew, the parable of the pounds in Luke, and remember the story, that there's a man who has a certain amount of resources and the master, the one who's in

charge says, "Go, take this, invest it, multiply it, make it matriculate." And he comes back and that which had five has now got 10, and that which had two has now got four, and you see all the things that they did. We love the parable of the talents, we love to talk about that one day the Lord will reward us for service, he will one day acknowledge our obedience, but one of the things we often overlook is Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the talents. Oh sure, he who had five now has 10, I get that, but the every end, do you know what he says to them? "And you shall be over 10 cities." Now that's not just some random statement. What was Jesus Christ saying? He was saying as a believer, as a follower, as a child of his, when we live a life of obedience to him, that one day when he reigns on the earth, the amount that we have the privilege of serving with him will be determined by our faithfulness on this side.

So Jesus Christ will one day return, Jesus Christ will one day reign. We have the opportunity to come with him. We have the opportunity to reign with him. Then you get to the end of chapter 20, beginning in verse 11, probably one of the most famous events in all of the Bible, we formally call it the Great White Throne Judgment, this time in life where the heavens and the earth have fled away, where the Lord himself is seated on his throne, and according to what we're about to read, the small, the great, the rich, the poor, the bond and the free stand before God. It says in verse 11,

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

I want you to notice the chronology: Jesus returns, Jesus reigns, and now finally there is resolution, finally now all of humanity from the garden of Eden to you and I, all the history of humanity is there around the throne of God. Now notice this is something the Lord had been talking about for a long time, in fact, when it says here that the heaven and the earth fled away at his presence, all the way back in 2 Peter 3 it says there is a day that is coming where all that we know about this creation will be dissolved, it will be consumed in the flame. In fact, it's even mentioned in that famous old song, "Amazing Grace." What do we have?

The Lord on his throne and all of creation standing there, but there's another promise of God that's coming to fruition. Hebrews 9:27, he says all men and ladies must die and face the judgment. Humanity must give an account to their Creator. Humanity must stand before the one who formed them, who fashioned them, and more importantly was willing to shed his blood for them, and they must give an account. Now you'll notice that there's

two groups of individuals, there are those whose names are in the book of works, and those that are written in the book of life. For those of you that have been attenders and members for some time, what I'm about to share with you is not new to you. There are many people that I've met throughout time who say, "One day, one day when I see God face-to-face, I'm going to tell him exactly what I think about things." No, you're not. "I'm going to give him a piece of my mind." Do you notice anybody talking? No. In fact, when the book of works are opened up and you discover that every deed, action, word and thought is completely recorded, there won't be any arguing, there won't be any disputing, there won't be any shaking my fist at God. What will happen is exactly what the Bible says in Philippians 2, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess.

Oh, but just like we had the privilege of being with his return, just like the privilege of reigning with him, there's a privilege here, it's called being found written in the book of life. Those who are written in the book of life do not experience the second death, they do not experience the lake of fire, they do not experience all the judgment that is displayed and described here in this passage. You go all the way back in the book of Exodus, the Lord mentioned this famous book of life and he said whoever's name is there shall not be blotted out.

Do you know the Bible says that one day as believers we shall "judge the angels"? If you can allow me to kind of give you a picture of what this passage looks like from a believer's perspective. The Lord is on his throne. The dead small and great come and are judged according to their works. Those written in the book of life, just like being behind him when he returns are pictured as being behind him when there is this resolution.

So what takes place as this world draws to a close? The Lord returns, the Lord reigns and then he resolves – listen – he resolves, if you'll allow me to say this, the case file for every one of us, and on that day there's only two places that you can find yourself, you're either before him written in the book of works, or you're behind him in the book of life. I know it seems like a very simple rhetorical question but on that day which side of the throne do you want to be on? And the only thing that makes the difference, not how good you were or how bad you stopped being, but the one who sits on the throne Jesus Christ.

He returns, he reigns, he resolves everybody's case file and then in chapter 21, he renews all things. Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 21 it says,

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. 2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things

new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. 6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

We've seen the return of Jesus, we've seen the reign of Jesus, we've seen the resolution of humanity's case files, ah, but finally when you get to chapter 21, there is renewal. Here it says there is a new heaven, there is a new earth, there is a new Jerusalem, and just like the Second Coming is mentioned eight times more than the First Coming in the Old Testament, you might be surprised how often chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation are spoken in what we know as the Old Testament. Just as a very simple example, it talks about in Isaiah 65 and 66 the recreation, the renewal of all things, but the one that gets me is the word "regeneration." Now that's one of those big theological words, it means to be born again, it means to be made new. Thankfully the Bible speaks of not only in John 3 but Titus 3 that you and I when we're saved, when we call upon Jesus, we are regenerated, we're made a new creation. Did you know there's only one other time the Bible speaks about regeneration, to be made new? It's in Matthew 19 talking about this passage we just read when it says that the earth, that all of creation shall be regenerated.

God has promised that one day he will not only return, that one day he will reign for a thousand years, that one day he will resolve all of our lives, but that he will renew the creative order. Why is this important? Because if you haven't noticed lately, where we are is messed up. How many times have you heard that we've got to either stop this, do that, or change this because what we know as the creative order is going to die out, it's going to go this, it's going to go that, it's changing, it's failing? How many times, how much money are we spending trying to fix a place that with one spoken word God is going to speak and change it all again? All this desire that we have for change, all this desire we have to preserve planet earth, I've got news for you. You can do all the stuff they tell you to do and do it times tenfold but it's not going to touch what the Lord's going to do because not only does he "change" the physical world, it says that you and I will no longer have pain, will no longer have sorrow, we no longer will experience tears. What a privilege is that, that for all of eternity a creative order without chaos, without sin, without despair and a life without any of the hardships of today. An incredible privilege.

All that we've read today, his return, his reign, his resolve, and his renewal, he could have easily said, "I'm just going to do it myself and you don't need to be a part of this." But what has he said? "Ah, if you believe." You see, in John 14, he makes a very statement to his apostles. He said, "If you believe in God believe also in me for I go to prepare a place for you, and if it were not so, I'd tell you. So one day I'm going to come again and I will take you there." That very famous passage in John 14 about the mansions and the streets of gold, he's talking about Revelation 21. He will make it renewed one day. You know, if

you keep reading in John 14:6, Thomas has asked him, "How do we know the way?" He said, "I'm the way, I'm the truth, I'm the life. Nobody comes to the Father but by me."

You know, today we've talked a lot about the privilege that we can have to return with him, to reign with him, to be on the right side of the throne with him, to experience all what's here in chapter 21, but I want to close in verse 8. For those of you that are new to us, it contains my favorite word in the Bible, "But." You see, everything we've talked about is a privilege, opportunity, access, but notice there in verse 8. It says but there are those who won't get to experience, there are those who won't reign, there are those who will experience the second death, there are those who won't experience the tears being wiped away. Oh, it's a very interesting list. It's very descriptive but I want you to notice the last thing: and all liars. You see, it's easy to read that list and go, "Well, I think I'm good. I'm not one of those," and then you read that last one and go, "Uh-oh," because if you say you're not one of those, you've just proved that you are. You see, we understand that there is a problem to all of this and the problem is the only thing standing in our way of experiencing all these incredible things with the Lord is our own sin condition, our own lack of willingness to admit that we've got a problem that only the Lord can fix. It's easy to say, "Well, I'm not that guy and I don't do this," but when you get to that last description, I think that places all of us in the same proverbial boat.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; nobody comes to the Father but by me." It's a rhetorical question but I'm going to ask it: in all that we've described today with his return, with his reign, with his judgment, with the renewal, is whatever you're not willing to confess, is whatever you so crave in the flesh really worth missing out on this? Is it really worth saying, "No, I just want to do what I want to do. No, I just want to hang onto my pride. No, I don't want to admit I've got that big of an issue." I don't think there's anything that any of you struggle with that would be worth missing out on this so why would you do so?