

Introduction: Working Hard

In our year-long “Major Topics of the Bible” series we have been trying to answer the “3 Great When’s of the End.” When will Jesus return? When will the Rapture occur? When will the Great Tribulation happen? If you are joining us for the first time, we have already answered the first two questions. We know that Jesus will return when his Daddy tells him so. We also know that the “rapture” happens as a simultaneous event with Jesus’ 2nd Coming during which he will rescue his church from the jaws of evil.

Although much of this apocalyptic stuff may seem vague, nebulous, and irrelevant, we must continue teaching it for four reasons:

- To prepare the church for these eventual realities. These forecasts are happening and will happen, it’s just a matter of time.
- To live in hope despite what we are currently seeing and feeling. Jesus is the “Lord of History,” and he will triumph over all of it, with us and for us. Thus, let us become enthusiastic agents of end-time hope!
- To live in anticipation of these futuristic things. I love Hebrews 9:28 on this motivating point:

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

And Philippians 3:20:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Anticipating the coming Kingdom helps us keep a “long-game” perspective and from getting “glued” to the fading fortunes of this world.

The 4th reason we preach and teach end-time stuff? It’s in the Bible.

The Great Tribulation Defined

God has prepared a glorious future for us, however, as famed theologian Ricky Bobby put it, “It’s going to get a little bumpy” before we experience it. That “bumpiness” is called the GT. As we said last week, the GT is:

The final era of history during which the Anti-Christ reigns with unparalleled menace to destroy Jesus’ Church.

In Mark 13, Jesus said this final era will be unlike any time in history, that if it wasn’t “cut short,” no one would “survive,” and that his church would come perilously close to being totally deceived and fully defeated. The GT will fit these descriptions because God will be venting his wrath on the Antichrist as the Antichrist vents his wrath on the Church. “Let’s get ready to rumble” is a phrase boxing announcers use as the contestants enter the ring. The Book of Revelation details the final rumble between God and the devil in a series of three judgements. They are listed as the Seal (6), Trumpet (8-11), and Bowl (16) judgements. The “Seal Judgements” start the conflict.

Seal 1: Rider on a White Horse coming to conquer.

Seal 2: Rider on a Red Horse wielding a “large sword” takes peace from the earth.

Seal 3: Rider on a Black Horse destruction of the world’s economy resulting in famine.

**Seal 4: Rider on a Pale Horse, along with Death and Hades,
turns the earth into a giant kill box.**

Seal 5: Jesus prepares to avenge the blood of the martyred Saints.

**Seal 6: Natural and cosmic disturbances, earthquakes, sun turns black,
moon turns red, stars fall from the sky, etc.**

Seal 7: Jesus, the “Lamb” initiates the seven trumpet judgements.

The saying, “You’ll never go from rags to riches” is certainly true in the GT! It gets worse during the “Trumpet Judgements”:

Trumpet 1: Hail and fire that burns up 1/3 of all living vegetation.

Trumpet 2: 1/3 of ocean turns to blood. 1/2 of oceanic life dies.

Trumpet 3: 1/3 of all fresh water is poisoned.

Trumpet 4: Celestial bodies refuse to emit light causing darkness for three days.

Trumpet 5 (Woe Trumpet): Demonic beings are released from the bottomless pit that torment humanity for 5 months.

Trumpet 6 (Woe Trumpet): 200 million troops kill 1/3 of humanity.

Trumpet 7 (Woe Trumpet): Christ comes back to end the chaos and eradicate evil.

Before Christ comes back there is an intervening period which can best be described as going from the “fire to frying pan.” Listen to the dreaded scenario of the “Bowl Judgments.”

Bowl 1: Festering and painful soars.

Bowl 2: Sea turns to blood and every living creature in the sea died.

Bowl 3: Fresh water turns to blood.

Bowl 4: Scorching heat and fire.

Bowl 5: Pitch Darkness.

Bowl 6: The unleashing of the dragon, beast, and false prophet from hell as a prelude to the Final Battle, Armageddon.

Bowl 7: Natural disturbances such as earthquakes and storm systems that produce hailstones of hundreds of pounds.

No one is quite sure if these judgments occur sequentially or chaotically, but the main unfortunate takeaway is that despite the Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl calamities, the mass of humanity still will not change its heart and turn to God.

Caricature of the Antichrist

Now the leader of this gang of hard-heated hellions is known as the Antichrist. This embodiment of personalized evil wants what his daddy, Lucifer: never got while he was in heaven, exaltation above God. He’s still pouting about this snub and would like nothing more than to extinct Jesus’ Church because of it. He has various titles that befit his rebellion against God, but the one we will focus on today is what Paul called him in II Thessalonians 2.

1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for [that day will not come] until the rebellion occurs, and the son of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Perhaps Paul had the horrible Roman emperor Nero in mind when he nicknamed the antichrist “the son of lawlessness.” Why this name? According to Romans 13, God has ordained the government to keep law and order. From the Church’s standpoint, an orderly society is necessary for three reasons: (1) To worship God freely, (2) To spread the Gospel freely, and (3) To be protected from hostile forces which as Martin Luther said, “Threaten to undo us.” When the “Big Bad” of history is “revealed,” the first thing he will do is promote

lawlessness by perverting justice and corrupting government. His sole intention is to become a “law unto himself” so that he can extinct the Church.

Last week we saw from I John 4 how the “Spirit of antichrist is already in the world.” Lawlessness is the spirit of antichrist, and it resolves to weaken government so that it will be unable to perform its God given duty to make and enforce law. Why? So that the antichrist can more easily persecute the Church. Remember this point when you think back on the OJ trial, the defund the police movement, or when BLM or Antifa riot, loot, and burn down cities all without ramification, penalty, or consequence. Think about this every time a corrupt politician is caught “on-the-take” from special interests and even other governments when judges and attorney generals go soft on crime rather than prosecuting and sentencing criminals. I could go on, but when lawlessness runs amuck the devil smiles because his job gets that much easier. When Jason Whitlock, a black Christian social commentator is asked about the root of all the chaos and mayhem caused by lawlessness, he accurately responds, “It’s demonic!” And he is right. For me, the most glaring sign that we are entering the initial phases of the GT is widespread lawlessness.

Caricature of the Antichrist (Haiti Experience)

Messages like these are a call to action for the Church. I see three immediate applications we need to jump all over right now. (1) If you are not a Christ follower yet, give your heart to him now so that you can resist the “spirit of the antichrist” that is already at work in the world. We’ll give you a chance to do so in a minute. (2) From 2 Timothy 2:1-2, let us be faithful in honoring and praying for our government and law enforcement. These are the only two earthly institutions that are tasked with “restraining evil” and protecting us. (3) Get involved in local civic stuff. That way we can better be the “salt, light, and the city” Jesus envisioned by influencing policies that staunch evil. Amen!