

MARANATHA: TREASURING HIS RETURN

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PREMISE: THE KEY THAT UNLOCKS UNDERSTANDING

1. The message of the end times cannot be digested apart from intimacy with Jesus. You can only comprehend God's plans to the degree that you live in the identity of being the object of His delight. Put simply, the revelation of God's plans depends on the measure to which you grow in your identity as His beloved—and vice versa. Consider the prophet Daniel.
2. Daniel encountered open visions and angelic activities. God even commissioned angels to interpret divine mysteries for him. Yet, after both visions in Daniel 7 and 8, Daniel concluded that he still did not understand: "And I, Daniel, was **overcome** and **lay sick**... I was **appalled** by the vision and **did not understand** it." (Daniel 8:27, ESV)
3. Then comes Daniel 9 and 10, where a divine pattern unfolds. Before Gabriel reveals the seventy weeks—the 490-year redemptive timeline—he first delivers a message that strengthens Daniel's spirit (cf. Dan. 9:23). That message releases the power which enables him to understand the end times:

"16 ... "O my lord, **by reason of the vision pains** have come upon me, and I retain **no strength**.... 18 Again one having the appearance of a man **touched** me and **strengthened** me. 19 And he said, "O man **greatly loved**..." And **as he spoke** to me, I was **strengthened** and said, "**Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.**"'" (Daniel 10:16–19, ESV)

4. The phrase "**greatly loved**" literally means "**to delight in,**" "**pleasant,**" "**precious**" and "**desired.**"¹ In other words, Daniel's ability to understand divine revelation was not rooted in intellectual capacity but in experiential intimacy. This is precisely why, in the Song of Songs, the Lord calls His Church "**My love**" as He beckons her up "**the mountains.**" The power that enables us to comprehend—and therefore partner with—God's end-time purposes flows from the message, "**His desire is for me**" (Song. 7:10).

"8 The voice of **my beloved!** Behold, **he comes, leaping over the mountains,**... 10 My beloved speaks and says to me: "**Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away,**" (Song of Solomon 2:8–10, ESV)

URGENCY UNTO LOVESICKNESS

1. The title of this conference—Burning Hearts—captures the very essence of the end times message. This truly is an Emmaus-road encounter (Lk. 24:32). Which is precisely why John encapsulates the entire book of Revelation as "**the revelation of Jesus Christ**" (Rev. 1:1). The central

¹ Strong, J. (2009). A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible (Vol. 2, p. 40). Logos Bible Software. Entry 2530. מָדַד *chamad*, *khaw-mad'*; a primitive root meaning "to delight in," "precious," "desire."

theme of the end-time narrative is not merely prophetic timelines but the unveiling of the glory of God. Even in raising up the Antichrist, God's ultimate purpose is to display and magnify His matchless beauty before all nations.

"16 ...**In the latter days** I will bring you against my land **so that** the nations may **acknowledge** me, when before their eyes **I magnify myself through you, O Gog.**" (Ezekiel 38:16, NET)

2. Therefore, the purpose is not mere intellectual assent or the satisfying of theological curiosity. The aim is to awaken a white-hot passion for Jesus Christ. Paul captures this vision clarity: "when he comes on that day... **to be marveled (amazed and wondered) at** among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed." (2 Thessalonians 1:10)
3. Jesus is coming back not only to receive our submission, but our adoration. Not only to be acknowledged as the price of our salvation, but the prize of our resurrection. He will not just be accepted as a firm foundation, but be embraced as "a **precious** cornerstone"(Isa. 28:16) and "a **crown of glory**" (Isa. 28:5). He will be cherished and treasured as "the **Desire of All Nations**" (Hag. 2:7). As 18th century woman once confessed: "God will have **no rival in heart** which he **sanctifies for himself.**"² Therefore, Isaiah encapsulates the climax of the end times in the following words:

"1 **In that day this song will be sung** in the land of Judah:... 8 **In the path of your judgments**, O LORD, we wait for you; your name and remembrance are **the desire of our soul.**" (Isaiah 26:8, ESV)
4. Or as in the words of Job: "25 then **the Almighty himself will be your gold**, and **the choicest silver** for you. 26 **Surely then** you will **delight yourself in the Almighty,**..." (Job 22:25–26, NET)
5. One theologian rightly articulated: "The living God is so glorious, he **cannot be known without being adored.**"³ That is the chief aim of God's end times plan. Justice is not the ultimate goal of the Great Tribulation. Lovesickness is. The Great Tribulation showcases God's supremacy in our lives. God grants authority to the Beast for a season (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:5; 17:17) to demonstrate whether Jesus Christ is more precious than safety, health, possession, family, and even life itself: "for they loved not their lives **even unto death**" (Rev. 12:11).
6. Persecution exposes what is our bottom line passion and deepest treasure. When this age comes to an end, and everything in the heavens and on the earth is shaken, God will "allure" (Hos. 2:14) the nations into the reality of "**I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine.**"

² Sarah Prince, quoted in George M. Marsden, Jonathan Edwards: A Life (Kindle Edition).

³ Reeves, Michael. Rejoice and Tremble: The Surprising Good News of the Fear of the Lord (Union) (p. 10). (Function). Kindle Edition.

"7 Alas! That day is so **great** there is none like it; it is a time of **distress** for Jacob; **yet** he shall be **saved** out of it.... 24 The fierce anger **of the LORD** will not turn back **until** he has **executed** and **accomplished the intentions of his mind**. In the latter days you will **understand this**. 1 **"At that time**, declares the LORD, **I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.**"'" (Jeremiah 30:7, 24–31:1, ESV)

7. Therefore, the most pressing question in this hour is: Are we lovesick?⁴

THE FINAL BATTLEFIELD OF DELIGHT

1. This is precisely why Paul makes 'love' as a decisive issue of the end times. He didn't just command us to study the return of Jesus—he exhorted us to "**love his appearing**" (2 Tim. 4:8). Then he delivers a sobering warning: "If anyone **does not love** the Lord, he is to be **accursed**. **Maranatha**." (1 Corinthians 16:22, NASB95)
2. Why love? Because the heart is the ultimate battlefield (Prov. 4:23; Jer. 17:9). The great falling away at the end of the age is not caused by mere ignorance, but by misplaced affection: "**be-cause** they **did not receive the love** of the truth" (2 Th. 2:10) and "**loved darkness** rather than **light**" (Jn. 3:19). Apostasy begins not in the intellect but in the affections. It is the matter of the heart preference.
3. When God is not our supreme delight, we become vulnerable to deception.⁵
4. That is why Moses warns that God will permit false prophets to perform signs and wonders to test the authenticity of our love: "**to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul**" (Dt. 13:1–3). He then exposes the root cause of coming eschatological calamities:

"47 **Because** you did not serve the LORD your God **with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things**, 48 **therefore** you shall **serve your enemies** whom the LORD will send against you,..." (Deuteronomy 28:47–48, ESV)
5. For this reason, Jesus warns that what keeps many from the wedding banquet of heaven is not brazen rebellion but subtle distractions. Tiny distractions can cause atomic destruction. For all the havoc Satan can unleash, Jesus tells us that what keeps us from the marriage supper of the

⁴ The purpose of divine urgency is deeper intimacy. For this reason, my prayer is encapsulated in Philippians 1:9–11: "9 And I pray this, that **your love may abound** even more and more in **knowledge** and every kind of **insight**" (Philippians 1:9, NET)

⁵ Paul echoes this warning to Timothy. He explains that in the last days many will depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:3) precisely because they will be "**lovers** of self, **lovers** of money... **lovers** of pleasure **rather than** lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:2–4). Then he adds: "For the time is coming when people **will not endure** sound teaching, but **having itching ears** they will **accumulate** for themselves teachers **to suit their own passions**" (2 Tim. 4:3–4, ESV).

Lamb is none other than **"a wife, a piece of land, a yoke of oxen"** (Lk 14:18–20). Jesus especially warns us against deception called **"the cares of life"** (cf. Matt. 13:22):

"34 "But **watch** yourselves **lest** your **hearts** be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and **cares of this life**, and **that day** come upon you **suddenly like a trap**." (Luke 21:34, ESV)

6. The cares of life is the forerunner of the mark of the beast (cf. Rev. 13:17). When God's most precious gifts take preeminence in our hearts, we commit idolatry. John Piper captures this danger with piercing precision: **"The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night.... The greatest competitors for our devotion and affection for God would be some of his most precious gifts. Good things can cause great damage."**⁶

HEZEKIAH: THE COST OF PROLONGING COMFORT

1. Isaiah 40 unfolds against the dramatic rise and fall of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a man who moved history on his knees. When the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem, he fasted and prayed. And in a single night, an angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 enemy soldiers (Isa. 37:36). When sickness overtook him, he got on his knees again. And the Lord healed him and extended his life by 15 years (Isa. 38:5). But then, something changed.
2. News of Hezekiah's success reached Babylon. Their envoys came, eager to see the wonders of his kingdom. And here, at the height of his influence, Hezekiah did not glorify God or testify of His faithfulness. Instead, he boasted of his riches and cutting-edge weaponry (Isa. 39:2). In that moment, Isaiah confronted him with a chilling judgment message. His compromise would bring calamity upon the next generation (Isa. 39:6–7). They will be taken as captives to Babylon.
3. But what follows is perhaps the most devastating part of the story. Confronted with God's judgment, Hezekiah does not weep. He does not repent. He does not intercede for his children. He simply accepts it. And not just with resignation—but relief.

"The word of the LORD is **good**." **For** he thought, **"At least** there will be **peace and security in my days**"" (Isaiah 39:8).

4. Hezekiah sacrificed next generation's future for his own immediate comfort—to prolong his recreation. Oh, how desperate the Church is in need of deliverance from this suicidal complacency (cf. Isa. 32:9). It is tragic to waste one's life in prosperity and security while forfeiting the kingdom. Hezekiah's complacency echoes Paul's warning to the End-Time Church:

⁶ John Piper, *The Hunger for God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997).

"3 While people are saying, "There is **peace and security**," then **sudden destruction** will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, **and they will not escape.**" (1 Thessalonians 5:3, ESV)

5. Isaiah 40 directly addresses Hezekiah's compromise with a promise of "**a voice in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord**" (40:3).

"1 **Comfort**, comfort **my people**, says your God. 2 **Speak tenderly** to Jerusalem,..." (Isaiah 40:1–2, ESV)

THE MESSAGE OF COMFORT: MY PEOPLE

1. When the Lord declares "**my people**" that is a manifestation of Yahweh's lovesickness. We must encounter the heart of lovesickness in the midst of God's end times activities. Consider Jeremiah 12. Even as He hands His people over to discipline, God still calls them "**my heritage.**" Even in judgment, He still tenderly names her "**the beloved of my soul.**"⁷

"7 "I have forsaken **my house**; I have abandoned **my heritage**; I have given **the beloved of my soul** into the hands of her enemies." (Jeremiah 12:7, ESV)

2. Isaiah 42 reveals God's master plan for justice (Isa. 42:1–4). This plan is fully realized in a person: Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 5:2–4). However, what we discover here is that this divine justice demands God's holy and righteous wrath (Isa. 42:13–16). God will not remain silent forever (42:14). The gentle and meek carpenter from Nazareth, who does not break a bruised reed (42:3), will return as a man of war to confront His enemies (42:13). But here's the problem—Israel has compromised (42:18–19). And God's holiness cannot overlook sin. We must consider the kindness and the severity of the Lord:

"23 Who among you will **give ear to this...**? 24 **Who gave up Jacob to the looter**, and **Israel to the plunderers**? **Was it not** the LORD, **against whom** we have **sinned**, in whose ways they **would not walk**, and whose law they **would not obey**? 25 **So he poured on him the heat of his anger** and the might of battle; it set him on fire all around, **but he did not understand**; it burned him up, **but he did not take it to heart.**" (Isaiah 42:23–25, ESV)

3. Pay attention the rhetorical question: "**Who gave up Jacob to the plunderers? Was it not the Lord?!**" This is unsettling. But the message is clear—calamity is not a fluke (Amos 3:6). It is not a random misfortune (Isa. 45:7). It is holy and righteous discipline, as Isaiah affirms: "He is **wise** and **brings disaster**" (Isa. 31:2). The real tragedy is that the people of God refuse to even consider this truth (cf. Isa 30:9–11; 2 Tim 4:3–4).

⁷ This is not the language of an indifferent judge. It is the cry of a heartbroken Lover. God finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). His disposition is to "**long to show grace**" (Isa. 30:18). Far from reluctant, He is "**abundant in forgiveness**" (Isa. 55:7). He does not begrudge mercy—He "**delights**" to show it (Mic. 7:18). His heart is not stingy—it is overflowing with steadfast love (Ex. 34:6). This is the very apex of His glory.

- Precisely against this backdrop of despair, the good news of Isaiah 43 breaks in. From heaven He came to sought her. Note the first word of Isaiah 43:1: **"But..."** This word changes everything. This is the same triumphant "but" in Ephesians 2:4: **"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love..."** This is the gospel. God does not leave Israel to destruction. He does not let sin have the final word. Instead, He declares: **"You are mine."** (Isaiah 43:1). But why? Why does He not give up on this rebellious Gomer? Attend to the all-important word **"Because"** in verse 4. Here comes the volcanic eruption of the Holiness of God:

"4 **Because** you are **precious in my eyes...** and **I love you....**" (Isaiah 43:4, ESV)

- If this sounds like symbolic hyperbole, turn to Hosea 11. There you behold the recoiling heart of the Bridegroom-God in Zion's controversy. Israel's salvation does not rest on her performance; it is anchored in God's own yearning heart (cf. Jer. 31:20). Attend to the reason for Yahweh's mercy in verse 9:

"7 My people are **bent on turning away** from me,... 8 **How can I** give you up, O Ephraim? **How can I** hand you over, O Israel? **How can I** make you like Admah? **How can I** treat you like Zeboiim? **My heart recoils within me**; my compassion **grows warm and tender**. 9 I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; **for I am God and not a man,...**" (Hosea 11:7–9, ESV)

THE EXPULSIVE POWER TO KILL LUKEWARMNESS

- I began this message by emphasizing that we can only comprehend God's end-time plans to the degree that we live in the identity of being the object of His delight. I then highlighted that urgency is unto deeper intimacy—that God's chief aim is to consume us with a white-hot passion for Christ, that He might be "the desire of our soul." This reality is not merely important—it is urgent. For the final battlefield of apostasy will revolve around the heart's preference. What is our bottom line joy? What is our deepest treasure?
- My prayer is that we would never shrink back like Hezekiah, but rise up from this season as a voice crying in the wilderness, proclaiming the message of **"My people!"**
- The cure for lukewarmness is not fear or shame—it is the glory of God's lovesickness. That is the key to a Maranatha lifestyle. As one Scottish churchman so accurately diagnosed and prescribed: **"The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one....** The fact is, that **the heart must have something to cling to....** It is **not by exposing the worthlessness of the world** that you **detach the heart** from it. It is **by setting forth a more attractive object** that you get the heart to move away from it.... The love of the world **cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness....** It is **only when**, through the gospel, **a more alluring object is presented, that the heart is won**, and the man is **turned from his idolatry to the service of the living God.**"⁸

⁸ The Expulsive Power of a New Affection by Thomas Chalmers