

## Eschatology

We affirm the bodily, personal, second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the saints, the millennium and the final judgment. The final judgment will determine the eternal status of both the saints and the unbelievers, determined by their relationship to Jesus Christ. We affirm with the Bible the final state of the new heavens and the new earth.

### **Introduction:**

The study of the end of time is called *Eschatology* and comes from a combination of two words. The Greek word *eschatos* simply means “last”, so *eschatology* is simply the study of last things. When we speak of “last things” we speak of the end of this age, or the study of the end of the world as we know it. The age to come will know no end as God will gather His faithful ones from every nation, tribe, tongue and people to worship and to serve Him throughout eternity. So eschatology deals with the transition from what we now know to what the Bible calls the “new heavens and the new earth.”

Much has been written about eschatology in the last few decades. It seems as though nearly every generation in history has considered themselves to be the last generation. But the “information age” has brought an overabundance of books on this subject. Sadly, many Christians glean their understanding of how the end will come from the many books that have been written rather than from Scripture. We must believe that God has given us everything we need to know about this subject in Scripture. Scripture will tolerate a wide spectrum of eschatological approaches, but the common denominator of all is the final triumph of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will culminate all of natural history with His final coming, and will reign with and through His Church forever.

This “Position Paper” seeks to clearly state the position of Meadowbrook Church in regard to eschatology. Since there has always been much heated debate over this subject, it should be kept in mind that the position of Meadowbrook Church does not presume that all other positions are wrong. We affirm that dedicated Christians who love God deeply have arrived at different conclusions than we have concerning this subject. This paper seeks only to state the position of Meadowbrook Church concerning this subject.

### **The Sudden, Personal, Visible, Bodily Return of Jesus Christ:**

Jesus spoke often about His return. “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:44). Jesus also said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3). Immediately after Jesus ascended to heaven, two angels said to the disciples, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven,

will so come in like manner as you saw him to into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The Apostle Paul taught, “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The writer of Hebrews wrote, “To those who eagerly wait for him, he will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28). Peter wrote, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (2 Peter 3:10). The book of Revelation, written by John, has numerous references to the return of Christ, ending with Jesus’ own promise, “Surely I am coming quickly” to which John replied, “Amen, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

The return of Jesus Christ is a dominant theme in the New Testament, and is a source of hope to us. These scriptures predict the return of Jesus as dramatic and visible. “He is coming in the clouds, and every eye will see him,” according to Revelation 1:7.

### **We Do Not Know When Jesus Christ Will Return:**

From time to time, people or groups of people make statements as to the exact time of the return of Christ. But the Bible tells us that we do not know when Christ will return, nor can we know. The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matthew 24:44). “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13). In fact, there is no way that people can know, for even Christ himself does not know when He will return. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Mark 13:32). In light of this truth, Jesus gave some profound counsel: “Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is” (Mark 13:33).

Though we cannot know the specific time of the return of Jesus Christ, Jesus himself indicated that we will be able to discern the season of His return. Within the context of the “Olivet Discourse” when Jesus discussed at length his own return, He offered this insight: “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near - at the doors!” (Matthew 24:32). Here we see Jesus indicating that we can know the general season of his return. So what are “these things” Jesus was talking about which will be signs of his return?

### **Signs Preceding the Return of Christ:**

All people can make reasonable predictions about future events based on patterns of past occurrences, but clearly human beings of themselves cannot know the future. Any insight or understanding of the future must come from God, who alone knows the future. God knows everything about the future and has told us about some of the major events which have yet to happen in the history of the universe. About the occurrence of these events we can have absolute confidence because God is never wrong and never lies.

The following are the signs that the Bible says must precede the return of Christ:

- 1) *The preaching of the Gospel to all nations.* Mark 13:10; Matthew 24:14
- 2) *The Great Tribulation.* The Great Tribulation is said to include wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines. Mark 13:7-8; Matthew 24:15-22; Luke 21:20-24.
- 3) *False prophets who work signs and wonders.* Mark 13:22; Matthew 24:23-24.
- 4) *Signs in the heavens.* Mark 13:24-25; Matthew 24:29-30; Luke 21:25-27.
- 5) *The coming of the man of sin and son of perdition.* 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10.
- 6) *The salvation of Israel.* Romans 11:12; Romans 11:25-26

We should be very careful how we evaluate these signs. Many scholars say that we need not worry about the return of Christ in the near future because it will be many years before some of these signs can be fulfilled. However, this evaluation runs contrary to the intent of Jesus in giving these warnings. Christians in North America tend to interpret Scripture from a North American perspective, rather than from a global perspective. From a global perspective, it seems that these have been fulfilled in some measure. Those signs which the student of these things may declare to yet have been fulfilled could certainly happen within the space of a few minutes. Let us be clear that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ can happen at any moment.

#### **The Resurrection of God's People:**

When Jesus Christ redeemed His people, He did not redeem only that part of people which is invisible, i.e. the spirits and souls of people. He also redeemed their bodies. God is Trinity, and He created people in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The completion of Christ's work of redemption will not be complete until our bodies are set free from the fall and brought to the full measure for which God created them. As for now, Paul says that "we wait for the redemption of our bodies" and that "for this hope we were saved" (Romans 8:23-25). Paul goes on to proclaim in 1 Corinthians 15 that at the resurrection of our bodies, our last enemy, death, will be destroyed. Paul wrote that "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

When Christ returns, He will bring with Him all those who have died (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Not only will Christ bring with Him all those who have died, but the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Verse 17 goes on to say that "we shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

At the return of the Lord Jesus, Scripture gives us two specific things that will happen: 1) His own people will be raised to life; and 2) Those who are not His children will be resurrected to judgment. Paul said that "there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). Jesus said, "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). Here,

Jesus clearly intends that the resurrection of life will be in eternal fellowship with God. The resurrection of judgment will be in eternal separation from God. The only difference between these two groups of people will be determined entirely upon their relationship to Jesus Christ.

### **The Millennium:**

The word “millennium” is a Latin word which means “thousand years” and derives its biblical meaning from Revelation 20:4-5, which says that “they (God’s people who have died) lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” The millennium will be the time of a great outpouring of God’s power in every respect. Paul said that “in the dispensation of the fullness of the times he (God) might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him (Jesus) (Ephesians 1:10).

### **The New Heavens and The New Earth:**

After the final judgment, God will gather all of His people into the full enjoyment of life in His presence forever. Christians usually describe this as “living with God in heaven forever.” But the Bible describes something even greater than that. The Bible speaks of an entirely new creation which will be the dwelling place for God and all of His people.

When Adam sinned, God cursed the ground because of his sin (Genesis 2:17-19). After the curse, the ground began to produce thorns the thistles and would only produce food for people by painful toil. But Paul says that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). God told Isaiah, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17). Isaiah goes on to say, “For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me” (Isaiah 66:22). Peter said, “According to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). In the Revelation to John, John said that he “saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1). Christians often refer to “going up to heaven” upon the point of death. At the point of death there will certainly be a separation of the body and the soul. Paul said that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Those who die previous to the return of Jesus will go to be with him. However, at the end of this age, the Bible says that heaven will descend upon the earth. John says, “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” and that “the dwelling of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:2-3). Scripture indicates that, in the end, rather than “going up” to heaven, heaven will come down upon the earth.

It is important to realize that heaven is a very real place, not simply a state of mind. Heaven is every bit as real a place as the cities in which people live today. During the present time, heaven and earth have not been joined. God says through Isaiah, “Heaven

is my throne” (Isaiah 66:1). Peter said that Jesus “has gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God” (1 Peter 3:22).

**Summary:**

It is clear from Scripture that there are some very important events in human history that have yet to be fulfilled. The Bible gives us a measure of insight into these events, called *prophecy*. These prophetic insights into the future were not given to people for the purpose of intrigue or speculation, and certainly not for the purpose of argument. These were given, rather, to motivate us toward a discerning lifestyle and to warn us against the dangers of lazy living. Throughout Jesus’ discussion of these things is the constant calling to be prepared, and for us to not be troubled. The people of God would do well to take these things as points of prayer and intercession rather than the building of an airtight doctrine.

**Resources**

*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, by Wayne Grudem.