

**WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY  
THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES**

**COMMENTARY  
ON MESSAGE #12**

April 29th, 2018

In this week's commentary I will cover two main topics:

- 1) Christians who disagree over eschatology
- 2) The different views held by Christians

Let's start with the first topic, the wide variety of interpretations in eschatology. Remember, eschatology is the branch of theology which pertains to the end times or last days. It comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means last or end. In this week's sermon we started to look into the rapture. There are many Christians who interpret I Thessalonians 4:13-18 differently than what we teach at Grace Community Church. Sadly, Christians sometimes go beyond "disagreeing agreeably" and become divisive, arrogant and overly critical of fellow Christians whose eschatology is somewhat different. Before I explain what some of the variables are, I want to joyfully affirm what all genuine Christians hold in common.

- 1) God's plan for history, including all future events, will be perfectly completed and fulfilled.
- 2) Jesus Christ will rule all things as KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS.
- 3) Jesus Christ is coming back!

*"He Who testifies to these things says,  
'Yes, I am coming soon.'  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."  
Revelation 22:20*

When dealing with Christians who understand some of the details of eschatology differently we should always keep in mind the foundational things which we all share in common and we should always esteem others more highly than we esteem ourselves.

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,  
but in humility consider others better than yourselves."  
Philippians 2:3*

In eschatology there are three main issues:

- 1) The rapture
- 2) The Kingdom
- 3) The relationship between Israel and the Church

**NOTE:** The following section is very basic and I am leaving many details out. This will, however, give you a basic picture of eschatology.

Grace Community believes in the PRETRIBULATIONAL rapture. The prefix (pre) indicates the rapture occurs before (pre) the seven year tribulation. The church (Christians of this present age) will be taken to Heaven before the tribulation on earth begins. Some folks hold to a MIDTRIBULATIONAL rapture. In this view the church is still on earth for the first 3.5 years of Daniel's seventieth "seven". The wrath of the Lamb doesn't really begin until the mid-point of the tribulation so the church is raptured to Heaven at that point. The third view held by some is a POSTTRIBULATIONAL rapture ("post" means after). In this view the rapture takes place at the end of the tribulation as part of the second coming. Jesus calls the church to meet Him in the air and then escort Him back to the earth as He establishes His Kingdom.

**KEY:** The term **second coming** is often confused with the rapture but they are not the same event. The second coming is described in Revelation 19:11-21. This is when Jesus Christ, the rider on the white horse, comes to earth as the KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS and establishes His kingdom at the conclusion of the tribulation. Although **post**tribulationists put the rapture immediately before the second coming, even they still distinguish between the two events. Grace Community, in keeping with **pre**tribulationism, sees the rapture of the church to Heaven, followed by a seven year tribulation on earth, followed by the second coming of Jesus to earth.

The second major issue in eschatology pertains to the kingdom. Please read Revelation 20:1-6. The kingdom is said to last 1,000 years, which is why it is called the Millennium or the Millennial Kingdom (millennium is Latin for 1,000). During the kingdom Jesus Christ reigns over the earth as the King Who sits on David's throne in Jerusalem. Many of the Old Testament passages which promise a time of future prosperity on earth under the Messiah's reign are fulfilled in this 1,000 year kingdom. For an extended treatment of the future kingdom you can read Isaiah 60-66. These chapters are prophetic and include information about the Messiah, about the travails of Israel before the Kingdom is established, and about the glories that come once the Kingdom is established.

*"But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,  
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.  
I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people;  
the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.  
Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,  
or an old man who does not live out his years;  
he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth;  
he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.  
They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

*No longer will they build houses and others live in them,  
or plant and others eat.  
For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people;  
my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands.  
They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune;  
for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,  
they and their descendants with them.  
Before they call I will answer;  
while they are still speaking I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
but dust will be the serpent's food.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain.”  
says the LORD.  
Isaiah 65:18-25*

- ☺ Did you notice that it is not actually the lion and the lamb together, it is the wolf and the lamb? People sometimes confuse this prophecy with other passages that present Jesus as both a lamb (John 1:29) and a lion (Revelation 5:5).

According to Revelation 20:11-15, the final “Great White Throne Judgment” of all unbelievers will take place at the conclusion of the Millennium/Millennial Kingdom. At that point earth’s history ends with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. The final two chapters of the Bible (Revelation 21–22) describes this and it is usually referred to as THE ETERNAL STATE.

Like the rapture, there are three different views of the kingdom. They are:

- 1) Premillennialism
- 2) Postmillennialism
- 3) Amillennialism

Premillennialism is the view that the second coming of Christ will occur prior to the millennium and that Jesus will establish a literal 1,000 year kingdom. This is the view taught by Grace Community Church. In other words, we teach pretribulational premillennialism (rapture before seven year tribulation, then the second coming of Jesus before 1,000 year kingdom).

Those who hold to a postmillennial kingdom take a different view. Postmillennialism teaches that the kingdom of God is **now** being extended into the world and that gradually the world is being Christianized and that the return of Christ comes after (post) a long period of peace and

righteousness called the millennium. In other words, the world is gradually getting better and in a sense Christians will triumph over the sinfulness of this world in preparation for the second coming which will immediately be followed by the Eternal State.

**KEY:** One hundred years ago postmillennialism was far more popular than it is today. People thought that advances in medicine, technology, nutrition and the vigorous spread of the gospel was indeed ushering in the golden age of man. However, World War I, World War II, the holocaust and the rise of persecution against Christians caused people to question the view of history that saw things as inevitably improving. When I was doing graduate work in American History I wrote a paper which connected President Woodrow Wilson's postmillennial theology with his foreign policy that led us into World War I (1917). At the time, people did not call it World War I because they could not imagine there could ever be another World War. There was no reason to call it World War I until after there came a Second World War (1939). In Wilson's day, it was called "the Great War" and many people optimistically called it "the war to end all wars." By 1950 world events had brought a spirit of pessimism that cause some people to question postmillennialism's optimistic view of human progress.

The third major issue in eschatology has to do with the relationship between the church and Israel. Israel was the focus of the Old Testament and Jesus' earthly ministry took place in Israel. The New Testament, after the resurrection of Christ and His ascension to Heaven, is about the church. In the most basic terms there are two options to us as we interpret scripture and put together our eschatology.

- 1) Because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah, **Israel has been replaced by the church**. The dozens of chapters of Old Testament prophecy about Israel not yet fulfilled will now be fulfilled, symbolically, by the church. This is called "replacement theology." Individual Jews become part of the church if they accept Jesus Christ as Savior, but the actual nation of Israel is no longer in a special covenant relationship with God. Promises once made to Israel will, from now on, find their fulfillment in the church. The church is now "the Israel of God".
- 2) Israel and the church remain distinct from each other. This is the view taught by Grace Community Church. Israel, as a nation, still has a future and a central place in those prophecies not yet fulfilled. We believe the PRETRIBULATIONAL rapture removes the Church from the earth and takes her to Heaven. The seven year tribulation which follows will be a time of great trouble for Israel. The enmity of the Anti-Christ will be intent on Israel's destruction. Finally, near the very end of the seven years, Israel will have a change of heart toward Jesus and call on Him for salvation. Jesus will return from Heaven, destroy the Anti-Christ and his forces, and save Israel (see Zechariah 12:7- 13:2).

After the resurrection and in the moments before He ascended to Heaven, Jesus's disciples (the Apostles) asked Him one final question:

*“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*  
(Acts 1:6)

Jesus did not rebuke them or correct them for their belief that there would still be a future kingdom for Israel.

*“It is not for you to know the times or the dates  
the Father has set by His authority.”*  
(Acts 1:7)

Those who believe that Israel and the church continue to have distinct destinies and that God has not replaced Israel usually embrace Pretribulational Premillennialism or at least one of the varieties of Premillennialism. However, let's close out this week's commentary by remembering the common ground enjoyed together by all Christians.

- 1) God's plan for history, including all future events, will be perfectly completed and fulfilled.
- 2) Jesus Christ will rule all things as KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS.
- 3) Jesus Christ is coming back!