

The Last Times

1. We have been talking about Time for the past 3 weeks. We have looked at a variety of subjects concerning time. And today, we are going to look at what the bible says about “The Last Times.” or the “Last Days.”
2. What are the “Last Days?” ~ some folks say we Christians have been talking about the “last days” for 2000 years...How can that be so? We will learn how and why today.
 - a. Last Days
 - i. **Last days is a reference toward the completion of God’s redemptive plans.**
 - b. Eschatology – which comes from the Greek word for (eschato), meaning the study of the last things, is something that many Christians have taken on as a hobby.
 - i. They can tell you more about the sequence of events leading up to the return of Christ than they can tell you about Christ Himself.
 - ii. Many of us have a favorite “expert” that has shaped our beliefs about the end times.
 1. Since the 1970’s, Hal Lyndsay’s book, The Late Great Planet Earth, has shaped people’s beliefs concerning the return of Christ.
 - a. It was well written and very well sequenced and made a lot of sense. It popularized many of the beliefs that most of us take for granted as sound doctrine...things like the series and sequence of events that will occur before, during and after Christ returns.
 - b. Such a systemization of events was developed that people memorized and began teaching them as gospel truth without having ever done substantial research of their own, or considering what the consequence of holding to these beliefs would be.
 - c. I like to refer to Lyndsay’s work as “pop prophecy.”
 - d. You only need to turn on your television to any of the Christian televangelists to hear someone else’s view or to hear a self-proclaimed expert on bible prophecy.
 - iii. But prophecy was never meant to be a paint by numbers picture that we could completely color in before the events occur.
 1. Prophecy is not so much “fore-telling” as it is a “telling forth” – that is, speaking the words of God.
 2. When events come to pass then the prophecy makes sense. It is nothing more than a blurry picture until that time.
 3. You can look for benchmarks and road signs...which also make sense when they come to pass as well.
 4. But when you treat prophecy as a paint by numbers project, you are really taking with the Word of God because there is substantial interpretation necessary with prophecy.
 5. My recommendation is that when folks paint the end times by numbers, filling in all of the gaps and making a very pretty diagram...turn off the tv!
 - a. It might be interesting but it will not benefit you.
 - b. They are scratching your ears. (that is a reference to the bible’s warning that people will not put up with sound doctrine in the end times, but will prefer to have their itchy ears scratched.) (2 Timothy 4:3).
3. Now my job today is not to espouse a *particular* end time scenario or to try to get you to subscribe to my particular view.
 - a. It is to proclaim the truth that **there will come an end time.**

- b. When the end time is completed *there will be a set of consequences* for each and every human being upon the earth.
 - i. That end of time is also called the “day of the Lord.”
- c. Day of the Lord - Refers to a day of judgment every one of the 23 verses that contain it.
 - i. The actual “Day of the Lord” will be the “time of the end” or consummation of the complete plan of God for the earth and mankind.
 - ii. The entire concept of the “Day of the Lord” in the Old Testament is dark and foreboding.
 - iii. But the New Testament concept of the end is filled with elements of hope and joy and victory.
 - 1. In the New Testament it becomes the day of Christ, the day of His coming in the glory of His father.
 - 2. New Testament writers took up the Old Testament expression to point to Christ's final victory and the final judgment of sinners
 - 3. The day of the Lord points to the promise that God's eternal sovereignty over all creation and all nations will one day become crystal clear to all creatures.
 - 4. To the unbeliever, the New Testament depicts it as a day of terror; to the believer, as a day of joy.
 - 5. For on that day Christ will raise the dead...the bodies of those that believed in Him--*“that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day”* (John 6:39)

4. Key Verse

- a. Hebrews 1:1-3 *“1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. 2 But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he made the universe and everything in it. 3 The Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly. He sustains the universe by the mighty power of his command. After he died to cleanse us from the stain of sin, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God of heaven.”*
- b. This passage is not about us groping and searching for God, trying to get Him to hear us...it is about God seeking us out and speaking to us.
 - i. The passage makes it very clear that God is in the business of “speaking” to men.
 - ii. It says, *“Long ago, God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets.”*
 - iii. The writer of Hebrews says that long ago God began speaking through the prophets. Through the Law, the prophets and his own activity in history, he communicated with man to reveal what he is like.
 - iv. God has spoken MANY TIMES and in MANY WAYS.
 - v. *God speaking and us hearing is supposed to be a normal part of the Christian life, not the exception.*
 - 1. We know that God has spoken first in the bible, and He has spoken in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.
 - 2. And God also speaks through His Holy Spirit, into the hearts and minds of believers. (but that is another subject).
- c. Let me paint the big picture of what we know about God **speaking**:
 - i. Genesis begins with the **Spoken** Word of God creating the universe, the light and darkness, the animal world and finally humanity.
 - 1. Everything was created by his word. He **spoke** all of creation into place.

- ii. It was God who **spoke** from the heavens to Abraham and set him off on a great adventure of faith.
 - iii. It was God who **spoke** to Moses in a burning bush
 - iv. He spoke to to Elijah in a still small voice.
 - v. He **spoke** through the prophets about various needs and the state of the nation of Israel.
 - vi. During the Exodus, God **spoke** of Himself as the One who would use the Jews to be the nation through which He would save mankind.
 - vii. Finally he **spoke** to us in his Son, the greatest of all communications from God.
 - viii. His message grew increasingly clear through the centuries, taking place from the beginning and finally at the crescendo of history he made his message perfectly clear.
- d. God completed his communication to us by becoming a man himself.
- i. *v2 But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son*
 - ii. In the last days at the end of the process of telling us what he was like, God the Son was born into history so we could see what he was like.
 - 1. We heard what mattered to him the most and began to understand the divine character of God.
 - 2. God became a man and entered into our experience so that we could know and understand him.

5. When did the Last Days begin?

- a. When John the Baptist began His ministry, this is when the “last days” were announced as about to begin.
 - i. Malachi 4:5 *“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.”*
 - ii. Jesus later tells his disciples that John the Baptist was this personification of this prophecy.
- b. Jesus is the embodiment of the LAST DAYS, being Himself the fulfillment of the entire bible in his person.
- c. And finally, in the book of Acts, Peter reads from the Book of Joel 2:28-32, and in no uncertain terms announces to the world that the Last Days have begun.
 - i. Acts 2:16 *“but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel 17 ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 ‘AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 ‘THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 ‘AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’*
 - ii. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is poured out Permanently upon believers. This is what Peter announces.
 - 1. Up to this point in time, the Spirit of God had been poured out only upon prophets and an occasional king, on a temporary basis.
 - 2. But now, He is given to all believers in Jesus.
 - iii. When a person gives his/her life to Jesus Christ something amazing happens.
 - a. You receive the Holy Spirit. He becomes a part of you.

2. I do want to draw a distinction, however, between what it means to have the presence of the Holy spirit, and what the fullness of the Spirit is.
 - a. When the Spirit's fullness is manifested in a believer's life, amazing things happened.
 - b. But when there is an absence of a supernatural work of God, it is because we are missing the fullness of the Spirit.
 - c. I'm not suggesting that we're missing **the presence** of the Spirit but the fullness of the Spirit.
 - d. And so as Christians we need to examine our lives and ask who is running the show in our lives.
 - e. If God is not heard, if God isn't given control, then you have only the Spirit's presence but not the Spirit's fullness and power.
 - f. This is why so many of us aren't working in the power of God.
 - i. We work in our own power.
 3. The fullness of the spirit is not something you can boast about.
 - a. Those who are full of the Spirit of God won't be boasting about it.
 - b. They will be serving in quiet humility, knowing that their strength and power comes not from themselves but from God.
 - c. They are broken people, broken of their pride and filled with the love of God.
 - d. Their boast is only in Christ and not in themselves.
 4. I have met folks who boast about their gifts...that carry themselves with spiritual pride.
 - a. That is not the fullness of the Spirit. That is pride, self and flesh ruling.
 5. But I have met folks who are emptied of themselves, dead to their own desires and priorities, and see God using them in amazing ways.
 - a. This is the attitude of Pentecost.
 - b. This is the power that you and I need to thrive and not just survive in these last days.
6. Signs of the Last Days and the Birth-pangs.
- a. A woman's labor pains increase in two ways: in intensity and in frequency.
 - i. The labor pains become more intense and the contractions come closer and closer together until the very end, when the pain is most agonizing, and the contractions almost continuous, one right after the other, and then the child is born.
 - ii. Since Israel became a nation once again in 1948, the intensity and frequency of these signs have increased like the birth-pangs of a woman approaching her time of delivery, exactly as He foretold.
 - b. **Spiritual deception will reach its zenith**
 - i. 1 TIMOTHY 4:1 *Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons.*
 - ii. Cults (Mormonism, JW, New Age, Wicca), Satanic teachings, and people will follow blindly. It is estimated that there are over 200,000 practicing witches in the United States & there are literally millions of Americans who dabble in some form of the occult, psychic phenomena, spiritism, demonology & black magic.
 - c. **People will not stand for sound teaching**
 - i. 2 Tim 4:3 *"For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear."*

- ii. Just turn on the tv and select your favorite flavor and get your ear scratched.
- iii. The sound teaching is the teaching of the Cross. (expound if nesc).
- d. **Mockers will denounce the Christian faith**
 - i. 2 Peter 3:3-4 *I want to remind you that in the last days there will be scoffers who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing they desire. This will be their argument: "Jesus promised to come back, did he? Then where is he? Why, as far back as anyone can remember, everything has remained exactly the same since the world was first created."*
 - ii. V8 tells us, *"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent."*
- e. **Wars and Rumors of Wars** (Matthew 24:7)
 - i. No period has witnessed the escalation of wars as has the 20th Century. The Red Cross has estimated that over 100 million people have been killed in wars since the 20th Century began. Up until 1914, war had never been universal, but in both World War 1 & 2, total war was waged.
- f. **Knowledge shall be increased"** (Daniel 12:4)
 - i. According to research studies, the total store of human knowledge is now doubling every eight years.
 - ii. 80% of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today.
 - 1. Every minute they add 2000 pages to man's scientific knowledge, and the scientific material they produce every 24 hours would take one person 5 years to read.
 - 2. About a half-million new books are published every year.
 - iii. When Apollo 13 was lost in space, computers worked out in an hour & a half a way to bring it back.
 - 1. It's reported that it would have taken a scientist working with pencil & paper over a million years to figure out how to perform the same feat.
- g. While these signs have been there since the beginning they are and will increase in frequency and intensity until the end. Some of us wonder...how can things get any worse?

7. The Last Days will end when Christ returns...in the Day of the Lord

- a. Heb. 9:28, *"So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."*
- b. Hebrews 9:26-28 *"but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, 28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him."*
 - i. Christ came at the consummation of the ages, and will complete it when he returns.
 - ii. After death comes judgment. We die only once. We don't reincarnate. Period. Judgment awaits.
 - iii. Christ will return for us.
- c. Matthew 25:1-13
 - i. *"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 "Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 "The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 "But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you*

too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. "

1. Oil is the image of the Holy Spirit.
 2. Both groups had the Holy Spirit. But only one group had what they needed for a lengthy wait.
 3. Does God just have you on Sunday? *(that is just enough oil to hold you for today, but not for a prolonged wait upon the Lord).
 4. Those who had extra oil, are symbolic of those who know that the control of God in their lives must be continuous and constant. Not sporadic and occasional.
- ii. Is there oil in your lamp? Are you walking by the flesh or by the Spirit? Are you ready for the return of our Lord?
 - iii. Let's pray.

