

## The Wrath To Come

On Sunday we concluded our intensive study of I Thessalonians 1 by focusing on the last verse in the chapter, which refers to the Second Coming of Christ and the turmoil that will precede it.

1. Warm-up Question: Suppose God delegated the timing of the Second Coming to you and gave you three options to choose from. The Second Coming could occur right now, ten years from now, or 300 years from now. Which option would you choose and why?
2. In I Thessalonians 1:9-10, Paul tells how the Thessalonian Christians “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and **to wait for God’s Son from heaven**, whom God raised from the dead – **Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.**” The two bolded phrases are references to the Second Coming of Christ.
  - a. When you hear phrases like “the Second Coming” and “end-times prophecies,” what kind of feelings does that evoke within you? Where do those feelings come from?
  - b. Some churches place a great deal of emphasis on end-time prophecies, teaching elaborate details about how it’s going to happen. Other churches only refer to the Second Coming obliquely and occasionally. What was your experience in the churches of your past? If you come from a background that emphasized end-time prophecies, how did that affect you?
3. On Sunday Jeff reminded us that, over the years, Christians have embraced a variety of very different interpretations of the Second Coming. Four of the leading interpretations are summarized on p. 3. Read those four interpretations together, then respond to the questions below.
  - a. Which of the four interpretations most resonates with you – and why?
  - b. Which of the four interpretations feels most “off the mark” to you – and why?
  - c. Does it matter to you which of the four interpretations is right?
4. Jeff called our attention to two key statements Jesus made about the Second Coming. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus said, “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” On another occasion, when Jesus’ disciples asked him when he was going to return to establish his kingdom on earth, and he said, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” Acts 1:8.
  - a. Does that mean Jesus himself didn’t know the timing of the Second Coming when he was here on earth?
  - b. What do you think Jesus was trying to say in these two verses? What’s his point?

5. All of the foregoing raises an obvious question: if we're never going to be able to figure out all the details of the prophecies about "the wrath to come" or the precise mode by which "Jesus will rescue us," why did God give us all these prophecies and what are we supposed to learn from them? Jeff suggested two enduring truths that emerge from these prophecies, regardless which of the four interpretations we embrace. **Enduring Truth No. 1 – No matter what happens, no matter how bad it gets, no matter how long it takes, rest assured that, one way or another, Jesus will rescue us! Which means there's always something better to come!**
- a. To illustrate this point, Jeff told the famous old story about a woman who wanted a fork placed in her hand when she was laid out in her casket, so people who passed by would be reminded, "Keep your fork! The best is yet to come." For anyone who didn't hear Sunday's sermon, have someone retell the story.
  - b. According to I Thessalonians 1:10, we're supposed to be the kind of people who are always waiting and watching and believing that, whatever we face, "Jesus will rescue us." Jeff said, "Show me somebody who really believes that, and I'll show you someone who is indomitable." What do you think he meant? How would believing it make someone indomitable?
  - c. Do you believe that, for you personally, the best is yet to come? Why or why not?
6. To stay balanced, and grounded in reality, it's important for us to remember that the very fact that Jesus needs to rescue us implies there's something we need to be rescued from – which leads us to: **Enduring Truth No. 2 – Although there's always something better to come, to get there we've got to go through "the wrath to come."** This is one of life's most fundamental patterns. King David had to fight Goliath before he could become King. Queen Esther had to risk her life in order to save her people. Jesus had to go through the apocalypse of the cross in order to triumph over the grave. Tribulation seems unavoidable.
- a. Jesus said, "In this world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." John 16:33. What do you think he meant?
  - b. In your life so far, what has been your Great Tribulation?
  - c. As you look forward in life, what's your worst fear, your worst nightmare? If that nightmare were to happen, do you think you would get through it? How?
  - d. Jeff said, "In our moments of Great Tribulation, we wait, we watch, and we trust in the promise – that Jesus is coming for me, sooner or later, one way or another – and that hope sustains us in even our darkest hour." Have you found that to be true?

## **Several Interpretations of the Second Coming**

### **Futurist Interpretation**

At some point in the future, there will be a time of Great Tribulation throughout the world that will become so destructive, Jesus will have to come to earth again to save us.

### **Preterist Interpretation**

When speaking of the Great Tribulation and Second Coming, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.” Matthew 24:34.

Therefore, the Great Tribulation and Second Coming must be located in the first century. In this view, the Roman invasion of Jerusalem (with all its famine, disease, and bloodshed) was the Great Tribulation, symbolically marking the end of the Old Testament Age during which God worked predominantly through the Jewish nation and the dawning of the New Testament Age during which God began to work through the church. In this view, the birth of the church represented the beginning of the reign of Christ on earth, i.e., his Second Coming, and will eventually bring peace and harmony to all the nations.

### **Historical Interpretation**

We are currently living in the Great Tribulation. It began with the generation of people alive when Jesus was crucified and has continued down through the ages until now. Eventually, it will get so bad, Jesus will have to return to save us. Historicists tie the prophecies of the Great Tribulation to a whole series of historical events such as the fall of Rome, the corruption of the institutional church in the Middle Ages, the printing of the first Gutenberg Bible, the Napoleonic Wars, etc., etc. right up to the end of time.

### **Universalist Interpretation**

Every generation of people from the first century down to the present have, and will, face their own unique times of the Great Tribulation and also experience Christ’s rescue. Like the movie “Ground Hog Day,” we humans, individually and collectively, keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again and reaping the same catastrophic consequences, requiring Jesus to rescue us time and time again.