

## A LASTING FAITH FOR THE LAST DAYS

PRACTICAL MEDITATIONS ON ESCHATOLOGY FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD <sup>1</sup>  
Part 1 of 5

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### ARE WE LIVING IN THE *LAST DAYS*?

**S**ome within, as well as outside of the church are asking if we are living in the last days. The New Testament Scriptures we are about to consider say emphatically "Yes! We are living in the last days". Notice in the following Scriptures how this is the historical context in which Jesus' Person and Work take on saving significance for his people. In fact in Acts 2:17ff, the Apostle Peter says that what was prophesied concerning the last days of God's salvation *has come* and helps us to interpret the significance of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-15). The author of the Book of Hebrews compares the time *long ago* in verse 1, with the *last days* of God speaking to his people by his Son Jesus:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:17-23).

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all

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things, through whom also he created the world (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The question that should be asked is not whether we are living in the Last Days, but rather, "Knowing we *are living* in the Last Days as the people of God, *how should we then live?*" The word *eschatology* simply means the "study of last things, or the study of the end, from two Greek words: *eschatos*, meaning "last", and *logos*, meaning "the study of" as in the word *biology* or *theology*. The important thing to note about the study of eschatology in scripture is that it is not so concerned about 'when Jesus will return', as well as all of the speculations that can go along with that. In fact that is exactly what Jesus does not want to teach us.

IT COULD BE SAID THAT ESCHATOLOGY IS NOT SO MUCH ABOUT US FINDING OUT THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT, AS MUCH AS IT IS ABOUT THE FUTURE FINDING US IN THE PRESENT AND INFORMING OUR LIVES IN LIGHT OF THIS FUTURE REALITY IN THE PRESENT.

Notice in the following verses that what Jesus wants to teach the people is to be alert, to watch, to be faithful to the Living Jesus, *just because* they do not know when he shall return. Practically speaking, Christ's people are called to faithfulness and preparedness in light of his coming, and they are called to rest in the finished work of Jesus as they proclaim that work to others.

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew 24:42-44).

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour (Matthew 25:13).

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come (Mark 13:31-33).

## ESCHATOLOGY AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Eschatology (or, literally "the study of last things") in Scripture is simply about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ and the inauguration of His Kingdom, the pouring out of His Spirit on His People and how they are to understand themselves as a New Creation-People. That is, eschatology is about what Jesus did when he came the first time in inaugurating his Kingdom here on earth.

Eschatology in Scripture is about the grace that was revealed in Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom, and the manifestation of the Kingdom itself here on earth. As well, eschatology is also about the grace, as well as judgment that will be revealed when Jesus' Kingdom will be fully realized when he returns.

Eschatology is not trying to fancifully and creatively try and understand 'when' Jesus will return, but it is about a way of life for Christians until he does return. Eschatology in scripture is concerned with teaching us an 'eschatological faith'. That is, a faith that is ever looking to Christ for salvation, living obediently out of gratitude here in the last days, while awaiting his return at any time! It is living by faith as Paul describes in Philippians 3:20-21. We are citizens of heaven, while we await a Savior from there. Notice the dual nature of our citizenship as Christ's people, as well as the dual nature of our location as the people of God: *in heaven*, as well as *here on the earth*. This should inform our identity as Christ's people as we await his glorious return.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself (Philippians 3:20-21).

How is biblical eschatology related to the Kingdom of God? When Jesus exorcised demons, he said the Kingdom of God had come! (Mt. 12:25ff). In Matthew 12:25, the Pharisees dispute Jesus' Messianic identity revealed in his miracles. The Pharisees blasphemously assert that Jesus does his work by the help of Satan, *Beelzebul* indicating their blindness to the reality of the King and the Kingdom of Christ. Jesus says to them that the miracles point to the greater reality of his Kingship, as well as the fact that His Kingdom has come, and will continue to manifest itself by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out

demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Matthew 12:25-28).

We should appreciate as the people of God that when Jesus healed men of sicknesses, he was beginning the restoration of all creation (Mt. 8-9) because he was undoing the work of Satan, or at least that work that resulted from Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden and the coming of sin, death, and misery into God's world. As the Great Creator himself (cf. Heb. 1:1-2; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15ff), he was beginning the restoration of all things, a foretaste of the New Heavens and the New Earth by the Spirit of God in his miracles. Jesus even reveals the coming of the Kingdom in these last days by calming the great waves of the sea that only God can do (Gen. 1:4-8; cf. Job 38:1-11)

Matthew 8:3—And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Matthew 8:13—And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Matthew 8:24-27—And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

Matthew 8:28-33—And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men.

From these verses (and there are many more, especially look at Matthew chapters 8-10 and how he gives this same authority to his apostles), we see that when Jesus spoke the Word of power he declared visually that the Kingdom of God had come in Him. In his preaching, Jesus declared that men repent for the Kingdom of God had come and was also coming (Mt. 3:1-17; Mk. 1).

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15).

Jesus declared that the last days, or the beginning of the renewal of all things had dawned, or begun in his coming. But there was also some confusion! (There is still much confusion today!) John the Baptist had preached that Messiah would come and set up his Kingdom. John had preached to the people that Jesus would gather to himself those who repented, but the others he would remove as chaff and destroy them, because his winnowing fork was in his hand (Matt. 3). Messiah was to preach the good news to the poor, bring salvation to the captives, healing to the sick, and sight to the blind, and bring in the terrible Day of the LORD (Is. 61:1-3; cf. Luke 4:18). However, Jesus' Kingdom came in an unexpected way. Even when John was in a dark and gloomy prison, either his faith waned a bit, or his eschatological expectations needed changing. What is clear from Matthew 11 is that John the Baptist was in prison about to be killed for his faith as forerunner of Jesus, and the Kingdom of God *had not come yet in Jesus*—at least in his own eschatological estimation.

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me (Matthew 11:2-6).

What Jesus communicates to John from the prophet Isaiah is that the Kingdom had come because the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the blind receiving their sight, the lame were walking, and lepers were being cleansed (Isaiah 29), and he was to believe this by faith. What Jesus is implicitly communicating to John, and to us today, is that although the Kingdom is coming in Jesus and the beginning of the restoration in the Last Days has begun, yet we are to be a people who live by faith for an indefinite amount of time ("Blessed is the one who is not offended by me").

Jesus reveals this delay elsewhere in Luke 4:16-21. Here Jesus preaches from Isaiah 61:1-3 on the Sabbath. He tells the people that the prophecy of Isaiah about the coming King and Kingdom is fulfilled in him, yet he leaves out a

very important part of Isaiah's prophecy, implying that there is more to come in the future. Again, implying that there will be a time period where the people of God must live by faith, trusting the LORD that he will return to be Judge of the earth, but not yet!

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21).

You see, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61, which says:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.... (Isaiah 61:1-2).

Notice by contrasting the Isaiah prophecy with the sermon from Luke 4 that something very important is missing. Jesus ended his sermon in Luke 4 with "to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor", yet the end of the prophecy is "and the day of vengeance of our God". This teaches us that Jesus' Kingdom should be understood in the Last Days as a Kingdom that has come in Jesus, but that will come in its fullness in the future. It suggest to us an interim that Jesus will make clearer as he moves closer to the crucifixion and the laying down his life for his people. The lesson that we learn is that Jesus' winnowing fork is indeed in his hand (we know this because when the words is preached some believe and some are judged already, cf. Matt. 13 in the parables), but he is waiting until later to bring about this final judgment. This is why the Apostle Paul teaches that "Today is the Day of Salvation" in these Last Days!

Jesus did indeed bring salvation; he preached the good news; he gathered to himself those who repented; and he released the captives, but the Day of the LORD was to come at a later time. In other words, Christ's Kingdom would come in two modes, or two acts. It began to come into the present age

with the coming of Jesus, particularly when he accomplished his life, death, resurrection and ascension and sent forth his Spirit who is called the "firstfruits" or "downpayment" of what is to come (Eph. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; cf. 2 Cor. 5:5). The Kingdom will come again when Jesus will judge the world. This interim period, called the "last days" is the period when Christ builds his Church and prepares his bride for himself in purity and holiness, while allowing men to repent of their sins and turn to the Living God avoiding the imminent coming wrath!

Biblical eschatology is about how the Kingdom of God came in Jesus Christ, but will come fully in the future. That is why the Apostle Paul says that "Now is the Day of Salvation" (2 Cor. 6:1,2). It is the time of hope as his people await our Living Hope to return (1 Peter 1:3ff).

## **TWO-FACED CHRISTIANITY IN THE LAST DAYS**

What kind of faith and attitude of life should the believer have in light of Christ's First Coming, and with a view to His Second Coming to gather his people to himself and to judge the world? As Christians, we should be the most two-faced people in the world in the Last Days. We should be a people who are ever looking back at the completed work of Christ Jesus on our behalf, while awaiting our Savior to return.

This kind of two-faced living is possible because of the Holy Spirit who lives within us because of Christ's humiliation and exaltation on behalf of his people. In the following scriptures notice that something new has happened in these Last Days because of Christ's work on our behalf. Notice how the Apostle Peter calls us to two-faced living in these Last Days because Christ's Kingdom has come, yet has yet to fully come!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3).

Peter teaches us that we have already been born anew, yet there is much more to be revealed in the last time (Peter uses "last time" and "last days" interchangeably). Our full salvation, or inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, is a *NOW-Reality*, but we wait for Jesus to return for it to be completely fulfilled. This hope keeps us focused on Jesus, the Author and Pioneer of our faith! This hope is a hope in the last days as we await the imminent and glorious return of our Lord Jesus, when we shall see him face to face! It is interesting to note comparing 1 Peter 1:3 and verse 5 (above) that

there "has been a salvation revealed" (past tense), and that same salvation "has yet to be revealed" (future tense).

Jesus is the Savior of sinners. This is a reality NOW! But we await this reality to be fully revealed. As the Apostle John says, we know we are children of God, but we do not know what we will fully be when we see him as he is. All who have this hope purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

A LASTING FAITH FOR THE LAST DAYS BEGINS WITH A STRONG, EXTRASPECTIVE (OUT-OF-SELF-FOCUSED-FAITH) IN JESUS CHRIST.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

Keep in mind that in speaking of eschatological living we want prayerfully by God's grace to understand more clearly what the Apostle Peter describes as "now" in his epistle to the persecuted and suffering church. Notice as you read the Apostle Peter's First Epistle how he speaks of the "NOW" as well as the "NOT YET": 1 Peter 1:6-"now you have to suffer various trials"; 1:8- "you do not now see him but you believe in him"; 1:12- "the things which have now been announced to you"; 2:10- "now you are God's people...now you have received mercy from God"; 2:25- "now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls". But Peter also teaches us of what is yet to come: 1:5- "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"; 1:7- "your faith may prove real at the revelation of Jesus Christ for his honor and glory"; 1:13— "set your hope fully on the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Peter is saying that Christ has been manifested in his Person and Work at the end of the times for our sakes (already). In

1:20—"But he will be manifested again to reward his people for their faith with an unfading crown of glory" (not yet). In

5:4—Also, if our salvation has been accomplished in these last days, how should we respond to suffering? Notice, that although now we suffer; the Lord has an end, an eschatology he wants us to look to by faith to give us hope now. In

4:9—"But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers". And in

5:10— “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.”

Let these great truths be the encouragement and insight of God’s covenant people who are living in the last days as we await his glorious return. Let us reflect upon our union with the Living and Resurrected Jesus, as we ponder the reality of our being seated in the heavenly places with him, knowing that our salvation has been fully accomplished in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and that although we will experience real pain, persecution and problems in this world, we have a Living Christ and therefore a Living Hope who will rescue us from sin, death, and misery when he returns for His People! Amen.