

Introduction to Eschatology

This morning I want to begin a new doctrinal study on Eschatology, or what is generally referred to as the doctrine of The Last Things, or The End Times. Eschatology is concerned with the final events of history, and how they will actually unfold. Stated in another way, it is a doctrine that deals with the final destiny of humanity, with what we would consider the end of the world as we know it, and of the nature of the kingdom of God. The range of subjects that it covers is very extensive and they are dealt with in both the Old and New Testaments. Eschatology focuses primarily on prophecies. You have to appreciate that the revealing of future events is in reality a very, very supernatural event and it proves the divine sovereignty and power of God. The Bible does not tell us everything about the future, but it does reveal to us the major events that are yet to come. In my mind, we should have absolute confidence in what we study simply because God's Word is always true. Our job is to rightly divide the information placed before us.

Now, I must freely admit right at the beginning of this series that of all of the areas of doctrine that we find in the Bible, this doctrine has so many different views that it is mind-boggling to me personally. There is no actual consensus. There is as much disagreement about end time events as there is in probably any other doctrine, and that can make it a very complex subject. For instance, there is premillennialism, Amillennialism, postmillennialism, a pre-tribulation rapture, a mid-tribulation rapture, a post-tribulation rapture, and no rapture at all. There is Preterism (or that all prophecies have already been fulfilled). There is dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism, covenantal theology, historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, futuristic premillennialism, and who knows what else. All of these that I mentioned, and they are just a handful, are all different views based on different theologies relative to the study of the end times. Obviously, that makes my job even more difficult.

Most all Christians agree on the final results of Christ's return, but the conflict arises over the details and the unfolding of future events. Christians disagree over the specific details that lead up to and immediately follow the Second Coming of Christ. For instance, some believe that the church will usher in the Millennium. Some believe that we are already in the Millennium. Some actually believe that the prophecies of Revelation have already been fulfilled in history.

The issue for me is what difference will a study like this make in your life. I have to ask that question as we get started. What will a series on the End Times really do for you? My prayer is that it will make you sober about the reality of life after physical death, about the judgment of God, and about the importance of knowing beyond any shadow of a doubt that you are truly saved. The reason is simple - once death happens, there are no more chances, so whatever spiritual decisions you need to make, they must be made this side of your death. Let us assume that you genuinely believe that you are a Christian, but because of that you also have played a little foot loose and fancy free with your obedience to the things of God. You have become comfortable with where you are in your Christian life, but have very little motivation to go any further than where you currently are. You pick and choose what you want to obey, and then ignore the rest. This is very common for many professing believers, but I find little to nothing that comforts me in that scenario. No matter your view of salvation and how it may differ with mine, I see nothing good that can come from that perspective. Let us take the opposite view that you are a deeply committed Christian who takes everything in the Word of God seriously, and you know with complete certainty that your life is firmly anchored in Christ. So, what should this study do for you?

Well, hopefully it will make you very sober about those that you love who may not be saved and who have very little evidence of anything in their life resembling salvation at all. This is a very common picture for many faithful believers.

Now, I can assure you that we will be looking at a mountain of information, but somehow the information that I give to you in this series must challenge you in some way, or it will have no value for your life. It must strengthen your faith in God and His utter and complete control over all of history. At the same time, it should make you very uncomfortable in those areas where you simply are not committed to Christ. If I can say it in a different way, the End Times are a time of judgment. There is the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers where they will receive rewards for their faithfulness to Christ, and at the same time will watch much of their life that has been “**wood, hay, and straw**” go up in flames with no reward. [1 Corinthians 3:12-15](#) describes this event when it says,

1Co 3:12 (NKJV) Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

There will be the Great White Throne Judgment and the subsequent Lake of Fire for unbelievers. [Revelation 20:11-15](#) describes this event,

Rev 20:11 (NKJV) Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

If for some reason you are left behind at the rapture, there are the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpet judgments, and the seven bowl judgments. On top of all of that, there is the Anti-Christ, the False Prophet, the Lake of Fire, and Armageddon. So, we cannot talk about the end times without talking about various forms of judgment.

The word “*eschatology*” comes from two Greek words – “*eschatos*” (last) and “*logos*” (discourse or word). So, it is the theology of the last things, or the events surrounding the end of the world as we know it, and it would include such things as the rapture of the church, the seven year Tribulation and Great Tribulation, Daniel's 70 Weeks, the Second Coming, the Millennium, future resurrections, The Judgment Seat of Christ, The Great White Throne Judgment, the eternal states of heaven and hell, the intermediate state and the final state, the Lake of Fire, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem to name a few. So, obviously, this is not something that we can study in 3-4 weeks.

Now, I have to say that all of this is quite inevitable. Whether we like it or not, we have to face death and a final judgment, and what life will be like in eternity. You can ignore dealing with these kind of

issues, but you cannot escape them. Let us just assume that we will die before the rapture of the church and all of the end time events begin to unfold. If that occurs, then what happens after physical death? What is our whole life actually leading up to, what is the future, and what does it hold for us – good or bad? What is going to happen to those who are not Christians? As we go through some of these questions, I at least want you to realize the practicality of knowing what is going to unfold and what will be the final state of both the saved and the lost. There is a great confidence that can be gained in your life if you know with certainty what awaits you on the other side of physical death.

It is important to appreciate that this is the beginning of a doctrinal series. Honestly, it is much easier and much more comfortable to attend a church where nobody takes doctrinal issues very seriously. Most churches do not teach much doctrine simply because many Christians simply do not like messages that make them have to think and to evaluate. I was teaching in class recently, and somehow this topic came up, and one of the students who was a pastor indicated that he had been teaching through Romans, but his deacons came to him and told him that he needed to speed it up a little because it seemed to be going too slow for the congregation. That is the problem. Doctrine forces you to think. It makes you to be much more cerebral than just listening to a message on how to be a better you. Many Christians seem to just want you to tell them something so that do not have to think.

For the most part, the characteristics of a weak church is that they only feed on the “**milk**” of God’s Word. [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](#) says,

1Co 3:1 (NKJV) **And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;**

[Hebrews 5:12-14](#) says,

Heb 5:12 (NKJV) **For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

Now, even though the doctrine of eschatology is a very large and broad topic, we are going to begin by looking at the church of Laodicea in [Revelation 3:14-21](#). That may sound like a strange place to begin, but this church was compromising its teaching of the Word of God. It was what we might call a very comfortable church. You could have attended this church for years and it would have probably been very pleasurable for you, but nothing much would be happening spiritually for your life. You would not be challenged, rebuked, corrected, but only encouraged and respected because it was a comfortable church. This is the problem with the seeker sensitive church today in that it makes everyone so blooming comfortable. It never wants to offend anyone or make them a little uncomfortable, so ultimately the Word of God is watered down, diluted, and weakened. However, at its roots, the church at Laodicea was a very compromising church. What does Jesus think of a church like that? Well, we will find that it is actually nauseating to Him, repulsive! The people may have liked it, but Jesus did not. It may have made them comfortable, but it made Him sick.

So, you ask, what has all of this to do with the study of Eschatology. Well, everything. I think it lets us know how the church in the last days may approach a study like this. Most people are intrigued with the last days events, with Revelation, with prophecy, and with the end times. Everyone wants to study Revelation. It is a book that fascinates them and seems very interesting. Unfortunately, being intrigued with these events misses the whole point. You must understand that history, all of history, is moving toward divinely established prophetic events –some of which are good and some of which are not so good. None of us can change those God ordained events from taking place exactly as God has determined and prophesied. The upcoming events are events of judgment, events of great suffering and loss, events unparalleled in history, and the church of the last days is simply asleep, indifferent, uncaring and unmoved. Everyone in this room is destined for judgment – either the Judgment Seat of Christ or the Great White Throne Judgment. No one escapes. Every person in this church this morning will face God one day and give an account of their life. No one escapes. It does not matter if someone is lost or saved, they will face God. For some it will be very good and deeply rewarding, and for others it will be the utter surprise of their life – an unimaginable nightmare that will have no end.

Now, I want to at least mention the major difference between the eschatological outlook of the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the primary outlook was the expectation that the future Redeemer would come and establish an earthly kingdom where He would reign over the entire world. Everything looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. However, the problem that the Old Testament saints had was a very simple one. They saw the first coming of Christ as what we know as the Second Coming. That is why it was so difficult for them to receive Christ as their king – simply because they thought that the first coming of the Messiah would usher in the kingdom of God in all of its glory and that Israel would be restored. Jesus simply did not fit the bill. In all of their Old Testament Scriptures they never saw the church age. It was what the Scriptures define as a “**mystery**”, or something that was hidden at an earlier time, but has now been revealed to us in the New Testament. So, from the very beginning, their outlook was skewed and partial at best – and ultimately led to the murder of their Messiah and the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. From that time forward to this very day, they were basically put on the shelf in God’s redemptive plan.

Now, I mention that simply to establish a benchmark that cannot be ignored. In a similar way, many Christians have failed to see the rapture and the Second Coming in their proper perspective – and even more so as we actually approach the great “*snatching away*” of the church. Most Christians see the rapture as a great blessing, when in reality it is most likely a form of judgment on the church. Why is that? It is because just like Israel in the day of Christ, the church in these last days is not fulfilling its God given role. I have talked about this often of how the Book of Acts is a historical transition from the nation to the church. The reason that the transition was even necessary was because the nation was not fulfilling its God given redemptive purpose for even existing. It was supposed to be God’s channel of redemption for the world, but to the contrary it had become very self-centered, very self-seeking, and incredibly exclusive. Rather than embracing its evangelistic role among the nations, it had actually rejected that role and had become so exclusive and restricted to itself that God could no longer use it. What God had designed to be the vessel through which many people would come to Him had actually become a hindrance to becoming a part of God’s kingdom. So, in a very real and dramatic way, God

had to place Israel on the shelf and create an entirely new and different vessel through which He could work.

For us in the church age, the same last days scenario is in play. The church that characterizes the last days is a very self-centered, self-patronizing, self-absorbed church. In simple terms, it is a church that is not fulfilling its purpose in the world, and the rapture serves as a stunning rebuke and removal of that ineffective channel of redemption. You may disagree with that if you like, but from a theological perspective, it simply does not appear that God would remove the present-day church if in reality it was accomplishing His purposes on the earth. Most big churches are only imploding to their own demise, and most small churches like ours are simply dying on the vine. Young people are migrating away from even attending church in droves, and seem happy to do it. It is mind-boggling to me personally for anyone to think that the present day church will reach all of the nations with the gospel. We find it difficult to even reach our neighbors, nevertheless someone on the other side of the world.

So, where do you want to be found on that day when Christ is revealed? Where do you think that your life today is leading you for tomorrow? How do you think your life will measure up against God's standard? Is your Christian life a model for others to follow or a model for others to avoid? Will you be declared to have been a faithful steward or just a casual onlooker? Will God declare you to have been a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor? Have you been someone who is rebelling against God and His Word and storing up wrath for the day of wrath, or as one to whom Christ can say “**Well done good and faithful servant**”? Those are the ultimate issues with which this study will challenge each of us.