

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: 2 Peter 3:1-4

“The Last Days”

Good morning! Today we have reached the last in the series of messages that we all went through together for the past three months. Thank you for bearing with me and Pastor Dave. I hope it has been enlightening to all of you as it has been to us. Some of you are thinking, “Pastor, more, more”. But some are thinking, “Pastor, no more, no more”. Well, I promised only 12 and I’ll stick to that promise. And so, appropriately, we’re calling the title of this last message, “The Last Days”.

In the early 1900’s, British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton while on a South Pole expedition, left a few men on Elephant Island, promising that he would return. Later, when he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the way. But suddenly, as if by a miracle, an avenue opened in the ice and Shackleton was able to get through. His men, ready and waiting, quickly scrambled aboard. No sooner had the ship cleared the island than the ice crashed together behind them. Contemplating their narrow escape, the explorer said to his men, "It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go!" They replied, "We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, 'The boss may come today.'"

This morning, we’re going to look at one of the most important doctrines of our faith, the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. And I want us to start by looking at a passage of the Bible that clearly mentions it. So, please turn with me

to your Bibles in 2 Peter 3:1-4, *“Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’”*

The subject of the second coming of Christ, which is also called the Second Advent, is a huge subject matter that deserves a more in-depth treatment than I can give it this morning. One scholar has estimated that there are over 2,000 references to the second coming of Jesus in the Bible. For every prophecy concerning the first coming of Christ, there are eight that look forward to His second! (Today in the Word, April 1989, page 27).

People in general, however, think that Christians are living in fantasy when they claim this important truth. Which was prophesied by the apostle Peter. And New Agers try to spiritualize it saying that Jesus has already come to those who have realized their Christ-consciousness. As we look at this important subject this morning, I want to ask and answer three questions:

- Will Jesus come again?
- When is He coming?
- What difference does it make?

I. Will Jesus Come Again?

Let’s begin by looking at the first question: Will Jesus come again?

The Bible is clear that the return of Christ is certain. John 14:3: *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* After His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to people for 40 days. After giving some final instructions, He was transported to Heaven before

their very eyes. Two angels then appeared and said in Acts 1:11, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

The early Christians were convinced that Jesus was going to return. In fact, they thought it was going to happen in their lifetime. From the first century up to now, Christ followers have always believed that Jesus could return at any time.

Now, the Bible tells us that the return of Jesus consists of two stages. It starts with the “Rapture”. This word is not in the Bible but the Bible clearly teaches it. The Rapture is an event and it refers to the time when the whole church is removed physically from this world. According to this teaching, when Jesus comes again, the whole church, you know, those who are true followers of Jesus, dead or alive, will be caught up in the air to meet Jesus as he descends from heaven. This is how the Bibles describes it in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (NIV), *“According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”*

Then, also, in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, it says, *“But let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed. 52 It will happen in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, the Christians who have died will be raised with transformed bodies. And then we who are living will be*

transformed so that we will never die. 53 For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die.”

I went to a church one time and I saw a verse on the door of their nursery that says, “We will not all sleep but we will all be changed.”

In the Rapture, Jesus will come quietly, so to speak, because only Christians will see him as they are meeting the Lord in the air. But, of course, people around the world will know what’s going on because they see other people, children and adults alike, vanishing suddenly.

Now, the second stage is called the “Glorious Appearing” as what Titus 2:13 says, “*While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*” This is when the whole world sees Jesus coming down to earth physically and literally. He will come with his angels to do battle with Satan and his demons and then to judge the world. In-between the Rapture and the Glorious Appearing is the seven-year Tribulation period. The first half will consist of prosperity on earth while the second half will consist of great suffering and sorrow. The Anti-Christ will be revealed and will start to persecute those left behind who choose to follow Christ. If you’ve seen the movie “Left Behind” that’s what it’s all about.

Having said that, and while affirming that I believe these things, I also acknowledge that many thoughtful Bible students do not see things this way. And I freely admit that there is no verse that says, “Christ will come before the Tribulation.” There is room for discussion and debate on this topic. In this message and in this series, I am teaching what I believe the Bible teaches. However, I encourage you to search the prophetic scriptures for themselves. Be a student of God’s Word. Read, study, compare, analyze. I commend the whole topic of Bible prophecy to you as one that is both fascinating and personally edifying. So, Jesus certainly will come.

So, Jesus is coming again. The second question we need to answer is

2. When Is He Coming?

The timing of the Lord's return is a bit more difficult to establish than the certainty of His coming. Please turn in your Bible to Matthew 24.

This chapter contains more about the end times from the lips of Jesus than any other section of Scripture. The material here has reference not only to events that were about to take place in Jerusalem but also to those stretching far into the future. Specifically, two momentous occurrences are intertwined throughout the chapter - the coming judgment upon Jerusalem and the final judgment at the close of the world's history.

It had been a wonderful day in the temple for the disciples. Their master had answered every question thrown at him and had lambasted the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in chapter 23. I picture them strutting as they walked away from their wonderful worship center when some of the disciples came up to Jesus and pointed out the beauty of the temple building in verse 1. I think they were pumped because they were convinced that Jesus was going to set up his kingdom and they would have some prime personal office space.

Jesus shocks them in verse 2 when he drops a bombshell on their plans: *“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*

After hearing the prediction of the temple's demolition, they turn to Jesus and ask Him some questions in verse 3: *“...when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”*

In the first part of his answer in verses 4-14, Jesus gives us three significant signs to let us know that His return is right around the corner. Let's look at these briefly.

3 Signs

A. The first sign has to do with False Things. We see this in verses 4-5: “*Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.*”

There have been many examples of false messiahs in recent memory. Jim Jones in Jonestown. David Koresh in Waco. Sung Myung Moon of the Unification Church in Korea. And at present, there’s this man named Apollo Quiboloy in the Philippines who claims he is the Son of God. As we near the return of the real Jesus, there will be an increasing number of leaders who will claim that they are the Christ. A lot of these so-called saviors have been surfacing in the land where Jesus actually lived. According to a recent TIME magazine article, a Psychiatric Hospital in Jerusalem treats over 50 false messiahs a year.

There will also be an increased amount of false teaching and a false sense of security as the end nears. The Bible clearly pictures the coming of Christ at a time when the world does not expect it. 1 Thessalonians 5:3: “*While people are saying, ‘Peace and Safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*”

B. That leads to the second significant sign in verses 6-13. Our world will increasingly experience Bad Things that will range from cataclysmic natural disasters to an outpouring of evil like we’ve never seen before.

Doesn’t it seem to you that natural disasters are on the increase? Killer hurricanes, deadly floods, and life-shattering earthquakes are almost a daily occurrence in the news. The bad news is that these disasters will only get more frequent and increase in their intensity as we approach the end of time as we know it. Jesus very clearly taught that earthquakes and famines are only the beginning of birth pains in verse 8. Coupled with natural disasters, we will see an acceleration of unbridled evil. 2 Timothy 3:1 says, “*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.*” And how about terrorists who have gone berserk in the past several

years? Very recently, we all witnessed these two misguided young brothers who terrorized Boston and the whole USA for that matter.

I don't like to be a prophet of doom, but I need to warn you that based upon the very words of Jesus, things are only going to get worse! If these are the last days, and I believe they are, then we ain't seen nothing yet! Random violence will continue to break out around the world. Nuclear weapons will appear in the hands of unstable people. Societies will break down, families will fall apart, and chaos will increase. Things are bad but the greatest evil is yet to come. Verse 12 tells us that even love will be in short supply: *"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold."*

C. These first two signs are negative, let's take a look now at a positive precursor that will indicate that the return of Jesus is close at hand. Sign #3 refers to some Good Things.

The first good thing that will happen as a prerequisite to the Second Coming may surprise you. Listen to the words of Jesus in verse 14: *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."* The word 'nations' in this verse does not refer primarily to political entities but to the various 'people groups' of the world. In other words, every group of people must hear the gospel message before the end will come.

As we approach the end times, there will be a marked increase in the tempo of world evangelization. There will be a renewed interest in communicating the good news of forgiveness and eternal life through Christ. We will see a new sense of urgency to penetrate the entire world with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ.

I believe that is precisely what is going on right now. There are reports from China, Latin America, Africa and from the former Soviet Union of unprecedented

church growth. As people hear about Jesus they are responding to His offer of a new life.

In tandem with the spread of the good news around the world, we will see an openness to spiritual matters in the last days. You see, God not only wants to give everyone a chance to hear, He wants to give each of us an opportunity to respond. 2 Peter 3:9 says that, *“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

I sense this spiritual hunger occurring in some people. Just before we went to the Philippines for our mission trip, this young mother called and asked if I could come to have a Bible study with her and his husband. Anabel and I went and the couple were really hungry for God’s Word, trying to soak in every teaching we taught from the Bible. She proudly showed us her own copy of the Bible and described to us how it is now her favorite companion. Then after coming back from the Philippines I called her and I thought that maybe her enthusiasm waned somewhat. But it didn’t. She asked for some more. I talked to some of you and you shared a similar experience with other people.

What’s going on? I think it’s another indication that the return of Christ is closer than we think. Sure, there’s a lot of false stuff and a lot of bad stuff going on. But, at the same time, there are a lot of good things happening. The gospel message is going out around the world -- and it’s penetrating hearts right here in this community as well.

In verses 15-28, Jesus reveals some specific events that will take place just prior to His return. Then, in verses 29-31, He speaks of His return to earth in great power and glory. I want to focus now on the last part of chapter 24, where Jesus addresses the question of “when.” Take a look at verses 32-33: *“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out,*

you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.”

No one will ever know the precise moment of His return as Jesus declares in verse 36: *“No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* The best we can do is to read the signs and know that the time is at hand. If anyone ever tells you that they know exactly when Jesus will return, don't believe him. That person is either a false prophet or a seriously deluded Bible student. Jesus strictly forbids setting dates for His return.

Look also at verses 37-41: *“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.”*

Here Jesus makes a very simple comparison to the days of Noah. What was it like in Noah's day? It was “business as usual.” While Noah patiently built the ark and warned people of coming judgment, people laughed at him and said, “It will never happen.” Noah's day was like our day - an age of skepticism and moral relativity. The more Noah preached, the more his contemporaries mocked him. They refused to believe that anything like a worldwide flood was possible.

And just as the flood brought sudden judgment to the world, the return of Christ will do the same. When Jesus returns to the earth, unbelievers will once again be “taken” in death and judgment and only believers will be preserved by God. And just as the ark saved Noah, even so Jesus Christ is the “ark of safety” for those who believe in Him.

These verses teach us that this present age will end in a sudden, dramatic judgment with a complete and final separation of the saved and the lost. We had better be prepared.

Because Jesus is coming again, we are called to be ready because Jesus may return at any moment. Look at verses 42-44: *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

Note the two main commands: “Keep watch” and “Be ready.” How does a thief come to your house? Sudden and unannounced. After all, if you knew a robber was coming, you’d be ready for him, but thieves rarely call and make appointments in advance.

Jesus is coming like a thief in the night. When we least expect Him, He will return to the earth. Therefore, keep your eyes on the skies and be ready at any moment to meet the Lord face to face.

That leads me to ask a simple question: When was the last time you got up and said to yourself, “Jesus may come today?” For many of us, it’s been a long time since we’ve thought about His return.

3. What Difference Does It Make?

The final question relates to the relevance of the Second Coming. What difference does it really make? I see at least three ways this doctrine can transform the way we’re living.

A. Encourage one another. This topic is not meant to make us apprehensive or terrified. After a lengthy discussion of the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul points out the comfort that comes from knowing that Jesus is returning. In verse 18

he challenges us to do something: *“Therefore encourage each other with these words.”*

The message of the coming of Christ ought to fill us with tremendous excitement. These are great days to be alive.

Let’s encourage each other to “go for it” spiritually. Let’s be completely committed, fully engaged, passionately involved in kingdom living. This is no time to play it safe.

The first Christians used to greet each other with the phrase, “Maranatha,” which literally means, “Come, Lord Jesus!” We see it used in the second-to-the-last verse in the Bible in Revelation 22:20: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” Believers also used it when they wanted to emphasize something. I wonder if we could start using this phrase in our conversations? Say to your neighbor, “Maranatha!”

B. Live pure lives. Here’s a good question to ask yourself when you’re involved with something that may be questionable: “Would I want to be doing this when Jesus returns?” Wouldn’t it be terrible to be ashamed when Jesus comes back? 1 John 2:28: *“And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.”* We don’t have time to study verses 45-51, but here’s the Biblical balance as we await the return of the Lord: Live as though He might come today.

If you knew that Jesus was coming tonight at 8:00 p.m., what would you do differently? What changes would you make? Here’s the deal. One day He will return. Therefore, let’s live in light of His coming today.

C. Ask Jesus to save you. If you have never turned your life over to Christ and received His salvation, then I want to appeal to you with all my heart. Be reconciled to God before it’s too late! Listen to 2 Peter 3:9-10 in the Message Translation: *“God isn’t late with His promise as some measure lateness. He is*

restraining Himself on account of you, holding back the end because He doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change. But when the day of God's judgment does come, it will be unannounced, like a thief. The sky will collapse with a thunderous bang, everything disintegrating in a huge conflagration, earth and all its works exposed to the scrutiny of Judgment."

Friend, I can't beat around the bush. The consequences are too staggering and the stakes are way too high. Let me say it as clearly as I can. If you have never made a decision to put your faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, you will be in deep trouble when Jesus comes back. Your judgment will be certain, swift, and severe.

Don't be left behind. Jesus right now is seeking a relationship with you. Respond to Him before it's too late!