

ACTS

OCTOBER 17TH, 2017 - LOVING THE APPEARING OF JESUS - STEPHEN VENABLE

I. THE END OF THE AGE

A. The Day of the LORD

1. This present age in which we live is “evil” (Gal 1:4). Yet it will be brought to an end, and a new age of everlasting righteousness will dawn. At the center of this transition is *the Day of the LORD* - the physical, bodily return of the Lord Jesus (Mt 24:29-31, Lk 17:24, 1 Cor 1:7-8, 2 Cor 1:14, 2 Tim 4:1).
2. The end of the age is *about Jesus* – His worth, His renown, His kingdom, and His people. The story of this age ends with Jesus having supremacy in all things and a holy Bride consumed with love for Him.
...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:6-11 (cf. Is 2:11-19, Col 1:18, 2 Thess 1:7-9, Rev 1:6-7)
“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” Hab 2:14 (cf. 2 Cor 4:6)
“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” Rev 19:7-8 (cf. Rev 22:17)
3. The unprecedented events surrounding this transition can only be understood in reference to the center. God has orchestrated a unique worldwide scenario for the express purpose of *exposing* the true condition of humanity and *confronting* the earth with the identity of Jesus.
4. This uniqueness will consist of a witness of Jesus (through preaching and miracles) unparalleled in both authority and scope, as well unparalleled trouble. The intensity of both trends will together place one chief question before the sons of men: *who is Jesus of Nazareth?*

B. Perspective

1. One of the challenges in studying the end of the age (eschatology) remaining focused on the main point of the drama even as we grow in our understanding of the details. The question of *how* His purpose will come about is *important*, but must not obscure the question of *why* it will all happen.
“These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...” 2 Thess 1:9-10
2. Beholding Jesus *now* by *faith* will always lead to a yearning to behold Jesus *then* by *sight*. Loving One whom we cannot see right now (1 Pet 1:8) causes us to set our hope *entirely* on the Day when He is revealed (1 Pet 1:13) and eagerly await His return (1 Cor 1:7; Phil 3:8, 20-21).
“...though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory...Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace [the resurrection of the body – v. 3-5, 10] to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:8, 13
“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” Philippians 1:21–23

II. PERILOUS TIMES

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come... 2 Timothy 3:1

A. The Severity of the End of the Age

1. The descriptions of the events that will surround the return of Jesus are overwhelming. Jesus was clear that at its height, the tribulation of that time will surpass anything in history (Jer 30:7, Dan 12:1, Mt 24:21).
2. There will be devastating wars, earthquakes, pestilence, famine, and fierce persecution. The judgments of God will ravage the earth and great multitudes will be martyred (Lk 21:16-17; Rev 6:9-11, 7:9-17, 12:11, 13:7, 20:4). Isaiah prophesied of the day when mortals would be rarer than fine gold (Is 13:12, 24:6; Mt 24:22). Who would dare argue with the description that Paul offers? *It will be perilous.*

B. The Greatest Peril

1. Scripture makes it clear that there is yet another peril, even more grave than martyrdom. More perilous than death is the danger posed by *deception*. Yet if we see that the premier issue at the end of the age is the truth about who Jesus is, we can quickly understand why the greatest peril is deception.

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you."⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many...²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive... Matthew 24:4-5, 24

2. Jesus is a man of perfect righteousness (Ps 45:7, Is 11:5, Heb 7:26) who is the true Messiah [king of Israel] and LORD [divine] (Acts 2:36) who will rule over all nations and receive their worship (Ps 2:8, Rev 11:15, Zech 14:9, 16).
3. It is not accidental that the focal point of the deception will be a man of lawlessness who is a counterfeit messiah claiming to be divine (2 Thess 2:3-4). He will attempt to conquer the nations and lead the earth into unprecedented idolatry and false worship (Rev 13:4-8).

C. The Crisis for the Church

1. This is not just a crisis for the nations. The New Testament actually focuses *more* on the crisis of deception that will face *the church* prior the coming of Jesus. There will be a falling away of such magnitude that it will constitute a definitive eschatological sign.
Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demonshaving their own conscience seared with a hot iron. 1 Tim 4:1-2
Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first... 2 Thess 2:3
2. Throngs of Christians are not going to vehemently renounce Jesus and have their conscience seared over peripheral subjects. It will be because in their hearts they did not have the "*full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself.*" (Col 2:2-3)

D. False Teachers and Sin

1. False Teachers
 - a. The broader context for the great falling away is an explosion of false teachers *within* the church that will pervert the biblical truth of grace and promote lawlessness and licentiousness.
 - b. These "wolves" (Mt 7:15) and "imposters" (2 Tim 3:13) will mock the day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:3, Jd 18) and the judgment to come. They will deceive the church into believing that the narrow gate is broad and the difficult way is easy. (Mt 7:13-14)
2. The Deceitfulness of Sin
Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Heb 3:12-13
 - a. Sin is deceitful precisely because it appears neutral when in reality it hardens the heart and makes it vulnerable to deception. The explosion of iniquity at the end of the age and the widespread deception are *deeply interconnected*. Lawlessness weighs down the heart and causes love to grow cold.
"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.³⁵ For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Luke 21:34-35
And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. Matthew 24:12
 - b. It will be because of a love for pleasure and self-indulgence that sound doctrine will be cast off. *God will send* strong delusion as judgment against the fact that men were lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim 3:4).
...and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth (2 Tim 3:7, 4:3-4), that they might be saved.¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion (allowing the false signs and wonders just described to take place), that they should believe the lie (falling away),¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Tim 3:4; 2 Pet 2:18, 3:3-7; Jude 16-18). 2 Thess 2:10-11

III. RESPONSE

A. The Greatest Commodity at the End of the Age

1. Pressure wrought by tribulation, persecution, and strong delusion will not so much sway men into a dramatic change religiously but expose what was truly in them already. The rain will descend, the floods will rise, and the winds will beat upon the house. Whatever is built upon the sand will fall. (Matt 7:24-27)

2. Only that which is established on *who Jesus is, what He did, and what He said* will remain and be able to endure the Day of the Lord (*cf.* Joel 2:11, Matt 24:13, 1 Cor 3:10-15)
 3. Therefore, the greatest commodity at the end of the age is *the knowledge of Jesus*. There is nothing more important and valuable than the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph 3:8). *We must acquire living understanding of who He is*. This knowledge will kindle a fire of love in our hearts that will not be quenched the midst of pressure, turmoil, persecution, and delusion (*cf.* Song 8:6).
- B. The House of the Watchful and the Wise
- “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:36 (cf. Mk 13:33, 37, 14:38, 1 Thess 5:6)***
1. Jesus offers a clear path of wisdom. By heeding His command, our hearts will remain *tender* toward the *truth* of Him and *sober* about *the hour* so that we may endure His Day rather than it being as a snare to us.
 2. The Lord called (prophetically) the house of prayer, “*the house of the watchful and the wise*”. As we are watching and waiting and fasting and praying we are like the wise virgins who acquired oil as they waited for the coming of the Bridegroom (Mt 25:1-13). We will love His appearing and be prepared!
- “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world...” 2 Timothy 4:8–10***