

Friday: “Tribulation” – but for whom?

Read: John 16:33³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

Reflect:

Another teaching of Dispensationalism is a future, “seven year tribulation” (or “great tribulation”). This occurs after God has raptured the true church “up to heaven.” Yet Jesus guaranteed tribulation for His disciples.

Quite often the teaching for a “great tribulation” (i.e., a future seven year period of intense suffering) is pieced together from the book of Revelation. Yet in Revelation all three uses of “tribulation,” along with one of the two uses of “great tribulation,” are attached to the Church (i.e., God’s people). Oh, I forgot to mention a “seven year tribulation” is never mentioned in the Bible. Furthermore, tribulation is used throughout the New Testament to indicate the experience of Christians (e.g., Rom12:12; 2Cor1:4; 1Thess1:6; 3:3,7; Jas1:27).

We must also remember the atrocious suffering many Christians throughout the world suffer on a daily basis (www.persecution.com). Can we really tell them the “great tribulation” has yet to start? What does that communicate to them? Are they not important enough for God to “rapture” them?

Respond:

Have you made the time to become more aware of the persecuted Church? There are resources at the Church Building.

A year ago tomorrow nearly 500 Christians in Jos, Nigeria were murdered because of their faith. Is that not “great tribulation?”

Is it possible the belief in a “secret rapture” is popular in America because we do not like to suffer?

Pray: Pray for Prairie View Christian Camp; a mission New Life supports. Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ, in a persecuted country, to have a stronger back to endure their suffering; they know their suffering leads to Church growth... Pray for Bob Griffin and Larry Hayes, New Life’s elders. Pray for protection from sin and strength during times of testing.

Saturday: *He Reigns – But Where?*

Read: Revelation 20:4-6⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them...Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded...and those who had not worshiped the beast...They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years...⁶ and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Reflect:

Dispensationalists teach a “literalistic” 1,000 year earthly reign from a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem (complete with animal sacrifices...but we will not go there today). Why do they insist on this? Because Dispensationalists believe all the Old Testament prophecies have to be fulfilled “literalisticly” for the Jewish people.

However, remember Tuesday and reading the Bible “naturally?” What we need to do is find the author’s intent, not a one-to-one correlation. Furthermore, the New Testament frequently shows how OT prophecies had fulfillment in “The Church” (e.g., Amos9; Acts15).

Back in Revelation, is “earth” mentioned in the above passage? Nope. In fact, if you do a word study on “throne” in Revelation, you will see it occurs 47 times. Of those 47, 44 are clearly in heaven; the other three are on the earth and associated with evil. Apparently this scene is in “heaven” – or else Jesus’ reign is “evil.” Hmmm...

Respond:

Why would animal sacrifices need to be reinstated (cf. Heb7:26-28)?

Read Deut1:8. What does that sound like (e.g., Gen12)?

Read Matt2:15; now read Hosea 11. Did Matthew use that text “literalisticly”?

Pray: Pray for the National Missionary Convention; a mission New Life supports. Pray for Ed Asbury, Keith Krause, and Mike Haag – deacons at New Life. Pray our worship tomorrow will be pleasing to God as we worship as a “family” (i.e., no children’s worship). Thank God that He is faithful to keep His word. Pray for all worship services today and tomorrow around the world – pray God is glorified in them.

We Want to Be...

November 22 – 28

For eight weeks this fall our Community Groups focused on “How to Study the Bible.” We used a DVD based curriculum made available by the Institute for Christian Resources. While I know opinions vary, I have heard a lot of good feedback. I am grateful for this because it is an indication that we take God’s Word seriously.

The first thing discussed in the Community Groups this fall was the Author’s Intended Meaning, or the A.I.M. of a passage. What this means is that the Bible cannot now mean what it never meant. In other words, if what we think the passage means is not what the author intended...then our interpretation is wrong.

Taking the A.I.M. seriously is (among other things) common courtesy. Seriously now, how would you like it if I took your words of encouragement and appreciation directed towards a friend and “interpreted” them to mean anything I wanted?

- E.g., “Well, what ‘Mary’ really meant is you are a moron and she cannot stand to be around you...so leave.”

Ridiculous right? How dare I right? So...does not God’s Word deserve to be kept in its original context and interpreted in light of the A.I.M.? (Yes!)

There is a comprehensive theological system out there that violates the Author’s Intended Meaning of many passages. Now, I must say this theological system started with good intentions. For that I am thankful. I also want to be clear that if people adhere to this theological system they can still be a part of God’s family. Fortunately God does not require us to know everything about the Bible perfectly. If that were the case, we would all be in trouble...

Yet there are implications of this system that are dangerous. Bluntly, it misuses God’s word. Amazingly, those who do not agree with their interpretations are slandered as being “liberal.”

What is this theological system? It is “Premillennial Dispensationalism.” Do not let the \$5 words scare you. “Premillennial” = Jesus comes back before the “millennial reign” (a period of 1,000 years) which occurs “on the earth.” “Dispensationalism” = a dividing up of human history into periods of time in which man is tested in respect to obedience of some specific revelation of God’s will.

How popular is this system? Ever hear of the “secret rapture” of the church or the “Left Behind” series of books? Yeah, that popular... Millions of people in America believe in the secret rapture of the Church. Why is this? That will be covered on December 6th. Yet for now I want us to look at some components of Premillennial Dispensationalism. The “secret rapture” is only one part...other beliefs of this system may be surprising. We will touch on the following teachings this week (which is not an exhaustive list)...

- Literal interpretation of the Bible (Tuesday)
- Strong distinction between Israel and the Church (Wednesday)
- Pre-Tribulation Rapture and two 2nd Comings of Jesus (Thursday)
- Tribulation (Friday)
- Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Saturday)

Monday: *Author's Intended Meaning*

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 ¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again... ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord... ¹⁶ ... and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

<p>Reflect: I do not think there can be any disagreement concerning Paul's purpose with this passage. Paul clearly does not want them to be "uninformed" (v13). After giving them information he commanded them to encourage each other (v18). Whatever he meant in verse 14 through 17 was directed to the believers in Thessalonica.</p> <p>Twice Paul says there is "no need" to write to the believers in Thessalonica. They knew how to show love to one another (4:9), and they would not be unprepared for Jesus' return (5:1). If we couple those two instances with how 11 times Paul makes reference to them "knowing" something (e.g., 1:5; 2:1,2; 3:3,4; 4:2,4; 5:2,12 et al) – it helps us see they are in desperate need of this information.</p> <p>I think this much is agreeable by everyone. There was a real crisis in Thessalonica addressed by Paul. Death is not an easy subject – especially if loved ones are being murdered for their faith (e.g., Acts7:60; 1Cor15:6 cf. Acts12:2).</p>	<p>Respond: If Paul did not address those in Thessalonica in these verses, does that make him a jerk?</p> <p>What is it you do not know about Christianity that you would like to know?</p> <p>How can you show concern for those who have lost loved ones during this holiday season?</p>
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Pray: Continue to pray for Ryan Nelson, the newest "church planter" hired by the CEA. Thank God for how His Word gave what was needed to the original readers and for how we can draw application from that meaning for us today as well. Thank God for the opportunity to worship Him yesterday as a body. Continue to pray for workers in God's Kingdom (Mt9:36-38).

Tuesday: *Literalistically or Naturally?*

Read: Psalm 50:1,10 ¹The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. ¹⁰For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.

<p>Reflect: Interpreting the Bible "literally" sounds noble does it not? Sure it does. Yet the problem is many confuse "literal" with "literalistically." What is the difference you ask?</p> <p>We all know the sun does not "rise" and "set." The earth rotating on its axis creates that effect. Does this mean God is wrong in Psalm 50:1? If we take it "literalistically" then yes it does. What about hill number 1,001? Does God not own the cattle on that hill? I think there are a whole lot more than 1,000 hills on the earth. Yet if we take the entire Bible in a "wooden," or "one-to-one correlation" type of way, or "literalistically," then we have nonsense for interpretation.</p> <p>The better way is to read the Bible "naturally." We read other things "naturally" all the time (e.g., junk mail, bills, letters, etc.). What I am getting at is if the author used a metaphor, or figurative language to get a point across (e.g., Song of Solomon – ch4) then so be it. Solomon <u>literally</u> meant a woman of exquisite beauty. Yet if we read it "literalistically" we have one, well, unattractive lady...</p>	<p>Respond: What are one or two other passages, which if taken "literalistically," could be a violation of A.I.M.? What are possible outcomes?</p> <p>If I am "driving you crazy," are you in a vehicle with me going to "crazy" Kansas? What am I "naturally" (and therefore <u>literally</u>) saying?</p> <p>Keep note of the amount of "figurative" speech you use and hear today. How could you misinterpret what is meant?</p>
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Pray: Pray for God to be at work at LCS, MCC, and OCC; missions we support. Thank God for communicating clearly to us through His Word – pray for our ability to not only understand, but be obedient to It. Pray for those who teach classes during the 9am Community Group time at New Life on Sunday. Continue to pray for God's people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29).

Wednesday: *Two seeds or One?*

Read: Galatians 3:15-16 ¹⁵ To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. ¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

<p>Reflect: As noted on the cover page, a teaching of "Premillennial Dispensationalism" is a strong distinction between Israel and the Church. In fact, "The Church" is really "Plan B" in their theology. Their belief is that in Matthew 12 (sometimes other passages are cited), with the Beelzebul controversy, the Jewish people rejected Jesus and His Kingdom...so God switched to "Plan B" and a "Gentile Church."</p> <p>Yet in the passage for today Paul says the covenant was for Abram's "offspring" (i.e., "seed") – which is now defined as through Christ. Either Paul is missing something (i.e., God's "Plan B"), or God only had one plan to redeem mankind...Jesus.</p> <p>Furthermore, the very word "church" (<i>ekklesia</i> in Greek) has its roots in the Old Testament. The word <i>ekklesia</i> is used in Deut9:10 to describe what happened back in Exod19 – when the Hebrew people entered into a covenant with YHWH. In fact, <i>ekklesia</i> is used throughout the Old Testament to refer to the assembly of God's people. This means "The Church" is not a New Testament phenomenon; it is a description of God's people.</p>	<p>Respond: If God needed a "Plan B" – does that mean He got it wrong the first time?</p> <p>Were the disciples Jewish? What about the 3,000 immersed on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts2:5,36-41)?</p> <p>How does Matthew 16:18 fit in with all of this?</p>
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Pray: Pray for Shiloh Home of Hope and Emporia Christian Schools. Pray for all of God's people to be humble as they interpret His Word. Thank God that He is the one who continuously works to bring people to Him. Continue to pray for God's Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).

Thursday: *Grammar Matters*

Read: Titus 2:11-14 ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation... ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness... ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us...for his own possession...

<p>Reflect: Did you notice how verse 14 sounds an awful lot like Exodus 19? What Jesus did for all is a "copy" of what God did at the Exodus.</p> <p>Dispensational teaching says the "blessed hope" is the secret rapture of the church while the "appearing" is Jesus' 2nd Coming. However, grammatically this is impossible. The same grammatical construction is used, <u>in the same verse</u>, to show how Jesus is in fact divine (i.e., "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"). It is bewildering how Dispensationalists teach of two events here (i.e., "blessed hope" = secret rapture & "appearing" = 2nd Coming) while keeping this text as one which says Jesus is divine. At best it is inconsistent...</p> <p>There are other examples, but space limits showing them. Truth be known, the early proponents of Dispensationalism did not know Greek and Hebrew. This does not make them "less of people" – yet it does mean they made some errors...which shockingly are still perpetuated and/or ignored.</p>	<p>Respond: A similar abuse of Greek Grammar is how Jehovah's Witnesses are able to say Jesus is <u>A</u> god in John 1 and not God as in a part of the Trinity. Interesting huh?</p> <p>If I am speaking to Andy and I say, "Bill, the guy in the blue shirt, is my friend." Do I mean two people or one?</p> <p>How else is grammar important when reading the Bible?</p>
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Pray: Pray for the ministry of Cookson Hills (a Christian Children's home and mission New Life supports). Pray for a willingness to submit to what the Bible says. Pray for Brent McCrory, the preaching minister at New Life Christian Church, pray for his discernment and study of the Bible. Continue to pray for open doors to share God's Word (Col4:2-6) and the boldness to do so.