

Lesson 3 – While We Wait for Jesus’ Return

Goals

1. To get a realistic and accurate picture of what Christians in the world will experience as they wait for Christ’s return on the Last Day.
2. To identify the great Antichrist of the end times spoken of in Scripture.

Opening Prayer – Lord Jesus, at times the waiting for your return seems so long. Comfort and strengthen us by the truth of your salvation. Guard and protect us, and soothe our troubled hearts by the promise that our times are in your loving and almighty hands. Amen.

Introduction – When describing what we can expect on the earth in these last days before Christ’s return, some Christians paint a pitch-black picture of trouble without any glimmer of hope or relief. Other Christians paint a rosy picture, expecting life on earth to improve until we have almost heavenlike conditions. Both groups support their ideas by leaning heavily on certain Bible passages while minimizing or ignoring others. Scripture presents a balanced picture of these last days:

Psalms 46 - God is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble. ²That is why we will not fear when the earth dissolves and when the mountains tumble into the heart of the sea. ³Its waters roar and foam. The mountains quake when it rises. ⁴There is a river—its streams bring joy to the city of God, to the holy dwelling of the Most High. ⁵God is in her. She will not fall. God will help her at daybreak. ⁶Nations are in turmoil. Kingdoms fall. God raises his voice. The earth melts. ⁷The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is a fortress for us. ⁸Come, look at the works of the Lord. What a wasteland he has made of the earth! ⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He shatters the bow. He cuts up the spear. He burns the carts with fire. ¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted on the earth.” ¹¹The Lord of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is a fortress for us.

1. What is God’s message in Psalm 46 for his people living in these last days?

What Can We Expect? – The Bad

Matthew 24:4-12 – Jesus answered them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵Because many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will deceive many people. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, because all these things must happen; but that is not yet the end. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸But all these things are only the beginning of birth pains. ⁹Then they will hand you over to be persecuted, and they will put you to death. You will be hated by all nations because of my name. ¹⁰Then many will fall away from faith. They will betray each other and hate each other. ¹¹Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹²Because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold.

It is fair to say that the majority of the signs of the end times indicate that we can expect trouble and evil.

2. What signs of the end times appear in the realm of nature? Underline them in the verses above.
3. What signs of the end times appear in the realm of secular activity? Circle them in the verses above.
4. What signs of the end times appear in the realm of the church? [Bracket] them in the verses above.
5. Name some specific examples of each category that have happened within the last 5-10 years:
 - a. Natural –

b. Secular activity -

c. Church -

The Bible also predicts that there will be one short but final all-out assault on the church at the very end of the world. The enemies of God will gather for a final battle, intensifying their promotion of false teaching, wickedness, and persecution. It will be “darkest just before the dawn.” Read **Daniel 12:1**; **Matthew 24:22**; and **Revelation 20:9-10** to see how God describes this time.

6. Agree or disagree and explain: We are living in this last, short period of intense and final wickedness.

7. What will the Lord do for his people living in this last period of intense wickedness?

What questions and comments do you have?

What Can We Expect? - The Good

8. In each of the passages below, there will be at least one good thing that God has promised will happen in the end times. Write them in the space provided:

a. **Genesis 8:21-22** -

b. **Matthew 24:14** -

c. **Acts 8:1,4** -

d. **Ephesians 1:22** -

e. **2 Timothy 4:18** -

9. In what specific ways have these good things been fulfilled in 2020?

What Can We Expect? - The Antichrist

The Bible predicts that there will be one particularly great enemy of the church in the last days. This enemy is called the Antichrist. The word *antichrist* is used only by the apostle John in the New Testament. The Greek prefix *anti-* means “against.” It can also mean “in the place of.” So, the word *antichrist* means “someone against or opposed to Christ” or “someone who sets himself up in the place of Christ.” In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul calls the Antichrist “the man of lawlessness.”

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 - Now, about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together with him, we ask you, brothers, ²not to be quickly shaken from your composure or disturbed by a spirit, a message, or a letter thought to be from us, which says that the day of the Lord has already come. ³Let no one deceive you in any way, because that day will not come until the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed—the son

of destruction. ⁴He opposes and exalts himself above everyone who is called God or every object of worship, so that he sits in the temple of God, displaying himself as God. ⁵Do you not remember that, while I was still with you, I kept telling you these things? ⁶And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed in his own time. ⁷In fact, the mystery of this lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who is now holding him back moves out of the way. ⁸Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy when he appears in splendor at his coming.

⁹The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan, with every kind of miracle, that is, with false signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with every kind of unrighteousness that deceives those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹And because of this, God continues to send them a strong delusion, so that they believe the lie, ¹²in order that all those may be condemned who refused to believe the truth but instead delighted in unrighteousness.

10. Paul gives a list of “fingerprints” or marks by which we can identify the Antichrist. Fill in the blanks.

- a. The Antichrist exalts himself, making himself equal to or even greater than _____.
- b. The Antichrist is not a political leader but a _____ leader, setting “himself up in God’s temple,” that is, in the visible _____.
- c. The rise of the Antichrist to full form and stature was _____, for initially he was held back.
- d. The Antichrist was “already at work” in _____ times and will be in existence at _____ day when Christ will destroy him “by the splendor of his coming.”
- e. The Antichrist is successful in bringing about apostasy because _____ supports him with false _____ to mislead many.
- f. The Antichrist is anti-_____, teaching salvation by a way that denies the biblical truth of salvation by _____ alone through faith in _____ alone.

11. We conclude that the biblical Antichrist is the _____.

Consider some other points:

- No one can point to who the first pope really was. The papacy just gradually appeared.
- In Daniel 7, Daniel sees the Antichrist rises out of the fourth kingdom, which is the Roman Empire
- Revelation 17 also speaks of an evil woman who is opposed to the church and sits on seven hills; the city of Rome rests on seven hills in Italy.

Lutherans are not alone in this claim. Others throughout history have come to the same conclusion, including:

- In AD 991, Bishop Arnulf of Rheims (probably the earliest ID)
- Italian author Dante Alighieri in *Inferno* (1265-1321)
- The 1647 Westminster Confession (Presbyterian)
- The Baptist Confession of 1688
- Influential church leaders such as: Jonathan Edwards, the leader of the Great Awakening (1703-1758); John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church (1703-1791); Charles Hodge, Seminary professor at Princeton (1797-1878); Charles Spurgeon, Baptist preacher in England (1834-1892).

What we are **not** saying is that “all Catholics are evil” or “all Catholics are going to hell.” From prior discussions and Bible studies, we know that, since the Word of God is present in the Catholic Church, the Holy Spirit can

still work faith in those who attend Catholic churches. However, there is a distinct danger that exists in the Roman Catholic Church. Consider these statements:

- “If any says that faith which justifies is nothing else but trust in the divine mercy, which pardons sins because of Christ; or that it is that trust alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema (damned)” Council of Trent, 1545-1563.
- “Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man” Catholic Catechism, 1994.

12. What’s the issue with those statements from a biblical point of view?

13. What makes the work of the Antichrist so deceptive?

14. “Jesus will overthrow [the Antichrist] with the breath of his mouth.”

- a. In what ways did that happen during the Reformation?
- b. In what ways is it happening today?
- c. In what way will it happen on the Last Day?

15. Give at least three reasons as to why Christians can be “realistic optimists” as they go through the events of the end times.

What questions or comments do you have?

Summary - Simultaneously there will be trouble and blessings for Christians in the New Testament era. We can expect calamities and evil of all sorts. We can expect the soul-destroying work of the Antichrist to continue until Jesus returns. At the same time, we can expect the church to spread into all nations and to continue to enjoy God’s protection until the end.

Closing Prayer

**Defend your truth, O God, and stay this evil generation,
And from the error of its way keep your own congregation.
The wicked everywhere abound and would your little flock confound,
But you are our salvation! Amen. (CW 205:4)**

This week - Read Revelation 4:1-7:17, noting the highs and lows of the end times and Judgment Day.

Next Time - The Events of Judgment Day