

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series

(Proph1_Introduction – Why Study Prophecy or Eschatology?)

Many within the Christian community have been turned off by eschatology due to a number of factors not the least of which is the proliferation of “prophecy nuts” and sales gimmicks. In addition, the number of prophetic passages in the Bible combined with different methods of interpretation just naturally leads to division. To many Christians, this division seems to go against Biblical exhortations to unity among believers (e.g. Eph 4:3, 13; Phil 2:2). Therefore, many Christians have decided to avoid the subject altogether in the interest of maintaining unity among the brethren. Sadly, this desire, while sincere, is somewhat naïve. Certainly believers should be on guard against any attitude that would spawn “unwholesome words” (Eph 4:29); however, Scripture is replete with exhortations for the believer to be discerning (Eph 5:6-7; Col 2:8; 1 Thess 5:12-14, 21; 1 Jn 1:6-7). The purpose of today’s lesson is to explore with you some of the ways in which eschatology has had an impact upon my day to day life. I hope that you will find encouragement from the observations I will share in the paragraphs to follow and that this more personal introduction to the subject will help set the stage for a fruitful series of studies to follow.

A Clear Understanding of Future Things Increases Love for Christ

One of the many benefits that I have experienced as a result of my study of future things is an increased appreciation and love for Christ. In the book of Revelation, John provides us with a description of the exalted Christ worshipped by all of the inhabitants of heaven (Rev 4) using terminology that causes one to realize the inadequacy of words in describing an eternal, all sovereign, all powerful Lord. Later in the book after we are given further insight into the cataclysmic events of the Tribulation period, we see Christ come to the earth again to defeat Satan and his cohorts (Rev. 19) and establish the long promised Messianic Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-3 cf. Isa. 35; Jer. 30:3; Micah 4:1-8; Matt. 4:23). As I read these passages, I am filled with awe for I know that their fulfillment in the future is just as certain as were the promises of the now historically documented 1st Advent of our Lord.

When I contrast the yet to be seen glory of Christ in His second coming and Messianic reign with the humiliation to which He allowed Himself to be subjected in His first coming, the result is true appreciation, love, and respect for my Lord. Passages such as Philippians 2:1-8 and John 1 are all the more deep with meaning. Here was a man Who remained totally objective and focused upon the prize set before Him. Here was a man Who set aside all the power and authority over the universe to subject Himself to transient and temporary earthly powers. Here was a man Who because of His humanity still prayed to the Father that if possible “...remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). The suffering was real, but Jesus kept silent in the face of abuse and injustice (Matt. 26:63; 27:12). Here was a totally humble; yet absolutely confident man. His confidence came from His understanding of future things and sustained Him in the midst of abandonment, abuse, rejection, and even death. Eschatology was an important factor in our Lord’s motivation. I have found that eschatology provides a sustaining influence upon my love for Christ that translates into sustained motivation.

Eschatology Provides Motivation to Develop Christian Character and to Serve

Christian character could be defined as the extent to which a believer manifests the life of Christ in his/her own life. Christ faced greater injustices than any human ever has or ever will. His motivation was the glory of future things that lay in store for Him and those who would place their trust in Him. There are those who have faced injustice in life to a greater extent than perhaps I ever will. And there are those who have not experienced some of the injustices I have seen. However, I have learned this. These injustices are all relative and rather superficial

compared to the glory that awaits His own, especially those who have persevered in the faith. With my eyes focused upon the future that awaits me as one of His own, I have found encouragement to stand strong and not waiver in the midst of loneliness, being the object of maligning and gossip, outright opposition, misunderstanding, and rejection. Eschatology has provided me with a vision of the goal toward which I run. As a result, my life has aim, purpose, and meaning that comes from a love for the resurrected and glorified Lord Who awaits me at the finish line. I want others to see Jesus in me and through me because I love Him and know the peace and direction that He can provide to the burdened and troubled soul.

Several passages document the fact that I will stand before my Lord and be evaluated on the basis of the deeds I have done as a Christian (e.g. Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10). At the Bema Seat Judgement, I will stand before the resurrected Lord and Savior pictured so vividly by John in Revelation 4 and be judged. This judgement is not to determine my eternal destiny for that destiny is secure (John 5:24; 10:29). The Bema Seat Judgement will be for the purpose of dispensing rewards for obedient service (1 Cor. 3:8, 14; Col. 2:18; 2 John 8). The fact that I will one day stand before the resurrected and glorified Christ and be evaluated is a source of motivation and encouragement that the world cannot comprehend.

Eschatology Increases One's Desire to See Others Evangelized

One day at the close of human history, all unbelievers will stand before the great white throne on which Christ sits and they will be judged. The books will be opened and their deeds will be evaluated (Rev. 20:12-13). However, if their name is not found in the book of life, they are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

When I try to imagine an eternal existence in a fiery abode that lasts forever, it makes me shutter. No friends with whom the next football game can be shared. No new business deal to close. No family to enjoy. No wife to love. No Christmas get-togethers to celebrate. No politics to debate. No distractions of any kind to help one ignore the grim thought of life coming to an end and facing an uncertain future. The future has come and the unbeliever will know no rest and will have nothing, absolutely nothing to which he can look forward to enjoy or distract.

Just the thought of such an eternal doom causes chills to run up my spine. In contrast, the grace of God has made a provision where previously there was no hope. Only God in His infinite wisdom could design a plan that is free of any human merit. Why wouldn't I want to share this plan with an unbeliever? The thought of someone spending eternity in hell makes me pity the unbeliever even if he/she has wronged me in some manner. I can look past a wrong done to me because when placed in the perspective of eternity, it is not the issue. If I have the same attitude in me that Christ had (Philippians 2:1-8), then the fruit of the Spirit will be produced in my life (Gal. 5:22-23) to include a self-sacrificial love toward the unsaved of this world.

A Scriptural Understanding of Future Things Provides Peace in a World Gone Mad

How many more movies can be made about the potential destruction of the earth by a meteor? It was only 10 to 20 years ago that the fear was of nuclear holocaust. At one point during the Cold War with Russia and her allies, the United States named its nuclear deterrent strategy MAD for Mutually Assured Destruction. What an apt term! If the world is not in fear of meteors, there is fear of nuclear holocaust or global warming or some other catastrophe that would bring an end to life on earth.

In contrast to the paranoia of the world, Scripture indicates that a spirit of fear should not characterize the believer (Rom. 8:15; Phil. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:7). How can a believer not be fearful of the possibility of such catastrophic events in the future? How does the believer deal with the idea promulgated by the media that he might be subjected to such disaster? God has given us a panorama of future events in the Bible. The certain future occurrence of these events is based

upon His sovereignty over human history, His immutability, and His veracity. This is further supported by the historically verifiable fulfillment of past prophecies recorded in Scripture.

What do we know about the future that provides us comfort and peace in the face of such grim prospects of the earth's future as presented by the world? How will the believer of the Tribulation maintain confidence in spite of the cataclysmic judgments to be poured out upon the earth and its inhabitants by God that will bear a strong resemblance to the movie topics of today? He will have confidence based upon his knowledge of Scripture concerning the fact that Jesus is victorious over Satan (e.g. Rev. 19), the long promised Messianic kingdom is established (Rev. 20:1-3), and a sovereign God will not let Satan prevail in his efforts to eliminate man (Rev. 20:7-22:17). Man, Satan, or any phenomenon of nature cannot destroy the believer's eternal destiny or prematurely cause history to cease. Eschatology provides me with great confidence in the face of such Satanic propaganda because I know Who the ultimate victor is going to be.

When One Has a Biblical View of the Future, The Things of the World Take on a Different Perspective

I sometimes have a chance to stop and realize just how blessed I am to live in a free country that has so much to offer someone who is willing to work hard and discipline themselves. A missions trip to a third world country or a missionary's visit to our church provides a stark reminder of what I so often take for granted. How easy it is to slip into the thinking of the world. I need to have a certain salary, a certain job assignment, a certain career path to keep on the road to financial independence and security when I retire. Retire! Retire to do what? What if, in spite of my planning, our country collapses? Should I get more involved in politics to insure that this doesn't happen? How this type of thinking contrasts with the peace and joy that should characterize those manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-23)!

I stop to think about how insignificant the once all-powerful Roman Empire at the time of Christ is today in regard to everyday life. Yet in that day, no greater worldly power existed. The leaders of the Roman Empire did not recognize our heavenly Father nor the One sent from Him even though they promoted such "good" causes as civil order, education, culture, and freedom of the Jewish religion to function. The Roman Empire provided an environment in which many prospered materially as life went on each day as it had the day before under Pax Romana. No doubt many Christians were lulled into a state of spiritual sleep or ineffectiveness by the pursuit of what the world of their day had to offer once the persecution ceased under Constantine. Why? They lost their focus on eternal realities as they became blinded by the present superficialities. How insignificant the so-called glories of the Roman Empire seem now! How superficial and passing! I now understand Paul's injunction that I not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2). The world will not come with me into eternity.

A Proper View of Future Things Removes Fear of Death

With a view focused upon eternity, living is Christ and dying is truly gain (Phil. 1:21). I long to be with the One I love and fall into His arms when my race is done. My treasure is not on this earth, but in heaven. I can't imagine the fear that comes from the uncertainty of not knowing one's eternal destiny. What terror death must hold for those who are clinging to the hope that their good works will just outweigh the bad and God will smile favorably upon a sincere go of it all. Years of denying reality leaves one face-to-face with the prospect that possibly not enough good was done to merit heaven. However, we don't have to fear death if we've trusted in Christ's work on the Cross.

A study of eschatology informs us that there will be judgments after death. But there's a big difference between the judgment of the believer and the judgment of the unbeliever. The believer's judgment is for the purpose of determining rewards in heaven (1 Cor. 3:12-15), whereas when the unbeliever is judged, he will discover that his works have been insufficient to save him and he will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). Since I know that death poses no

threat to my eternal existence with the Lord, I do not fear the possibility that I might end up in the lake of fire. Death has no sting for the believer (1 Cor. 15:55). Praise the Lord!!