

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood. We are beginning a new series and I am super excited about it. The series is called Endgame. We are going to look at what the Bible says about the future.
- B. It turns out the Bible says quite a bit about the future.
 - 1. Some philosophies, like eastern mysticism and Buddhism, say history as cyclical. It goes around in circles and repeats forever.
 - 2. Other philosophies, like materialism and atheism, say history as random. It is purposeless, random, and basically pointless.
 - 3. But then along come the writers of the Bible. With one uniform voice, they say history as purposeful and linear. It has a beginning. It has a middle. It has an end. And then it has a new beginning on a higher plane.
 - 4. Not only is history linear, but it is purposeful. Everything exists for a reason — nothing is random.
 - 5. And not only is it purposeful, but history is shepherded. Jesus Christ is the Lord of history, and he is bringing about the eternal councils of the will of God.
- C. Here is a sampling of what the Bible has to say about the Endgame of cosmic history:
 - 1. The Day of the Lord
 - a) *Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. (Isaiah 13:6)*
 - b) *Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand: (Joel 2:1)*
 - c) *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. (1 Thessalonians 5:2)*
 - d) *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10)*
 - 2. The Latter Days
 - a) *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: (2 Timothy 3:1)*
 - b) *knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts. (2 Peter 3:3)*
 - 3. Obviously, it's pretty heavy. But there's some awesome stuff too:
 - 4. *When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:4)*
- D. So there's some really cool stuff coming. So, let me first put on a professor hat and lob some theological vocabulary your way.

II. Eschatology

- A. If you see a verse in the Bible with the word "Last days" in it, there is a word that appears in that verse. It is a Greek Word, and it is translated "last." That Greek word is *eschatos*.
- B. So, that gives us a word in theology, and that is the word eschatology.
- C. So, let's wind back.
- D. *Theology is how we organize our thoughts about God from the Bible.*
 - 1. In theology, we look for everything the Bible says on a particular topic, no matter where it's found, and try to organize all that material into a coherent, consistent whole.
- E. When we are looking at what the Bible says about the second coming of the Lord in the last days, that topic is
 - 1. *Eschatology, how we organize our thoughts about end times from the Bible.*
- F. Want to refine this further?
- G. Sure. There is *general eschatology* — *which is all about the events that surround the second coming of Christ.*
- H. Then there is *personal eschatology* — *which is all about what happens to you personally after you die.* Where does your soul go? Where does your body go? And all that.
- I. Like I said, the Bible is a wealth of information on these things. In fact, it is our only information. We cannot say anything that isn't clearly taught in the Bible about the great unfolding of God's endgame in Scripture.
- J. Which leads me to some ground rules:

III. Ground Rules

- A. *Be charitable.*
 - 1. Biblical eschatology is a difficult topic. People who believe the Bible will reach different conclusions on some of the details. That's fine. When we are striving to interpret God's Word, and we come to different conclusions on minor details, it's okay. I was told of a family that left our church a while back, because I actually said the word "Rapture" in a sermon.
 - 2. Okay. I can see why you might not like that teaching, but why get so upset about it?
 - 3. When I was in seminary, my professor went through all the various viewpoints on the second coming. Then he said, "I think when all is said and done, we'll all be surprised at how wrong we were."
 - 4. Listen, the topic is hard. The reason it's hard is because it is so deeply interwoven with everything else in the Bible. It is hard.
 - 5. But that doesn't mean it's unintelligible. It's very intelligible, it just takes work.
 - 6. I will teach you what I see in Scripture. God gave you a Bible and he gave you a brain, so you can draw your own conclusions. You don't have to agree with me — it's okay.
 - 7. We are bound by one statement, and that is the official position of our church and our denomination:
 - a) "The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent and will be personal, visible, and premillennial. This is the believer's blessed hope and is a vital truth which is an incentive to holy living and faithful service." (Our Statement of Faith)

8. That's our official position, and from that we do not as a church depart. It's really important. And it's really biblical, and no one at our church in any level of leadership should be advocating any other position in any way than the imminent, literal, premillennial return of Christ.
9. Other than that, we can be flexible. So be charitable.

B. Be normal.

1. This topic has a rich history in the church. Some of it good, some of it not so good. There are always TV preachers ready to cash in on the second coming. And there are eager Bible students studying out the details, and trying to collate everything to current news events.
2. Some of this is legit — any time anybody really studies the Bible, that's awesome.
3. But some of this is just, well, extreme. Bible prophecy brings out some nutty extremists — I love you too. They come out of the woodwork, usually zeroing in on one aspect of second coming prophecy.
4. We are not going to set a date for the Lord's return. We are not going to name the Antichrist. We are not going to gather in purple robes on Mt. Shasta to countdown to the Rapture. No Rapture drills. No leaflets on your car in the parking lot. No speculation. No intense mathematical calculations to show the date of the Tribulation and the technology of the Mark of the Beast.
5. Because do you know why? We're going to be normal. We're going to look into God's Word, and see this wonderful promise that Jesus is coming again.

IV. What is the Second Coming?

- A. The Second Coming of Christ is a series of events surrounding the day when Jesus returns to earth from heaven to set up his kingdom, subdue his enemies, crush evil at its source, end history as we know it, and usher in the eternal state.
- B. Basically, the second coming of Christ is the day God turns off the pain machine, dismantles it, and throws it once for all into the eternal dumpster of forgetfulness.
 1. That will be a very good day, don't you think?
 2. No pain, no sorrow, no more tears.
- C. All of this takes a very long time to complete — but a thousand years is as a day to the Lord, and a day is as a thousand years.
- D. This second coming is the fulfillment of God's promises and the fulfillment of a boatload of prophecies. There will be signs of his coming — mainly in our culture and society — but also in nature and the heavens.
- E. There will also be a lot of moving parts in the second coming. Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of war. He compares the time of his second coming to the corruption and moral brokenness of society way back in the days of Noah. He talks about how society will redefine truth, and a growing confederacy against Israel.
- F. He even compares the Second Coming to the whole earth experiencing birth pangs.
- G. There are signs of his coming, and that's one of the things that's so intriguing about Bible prophecy and eschatology.
- H. There's a countdown to Armageddon. It's been triggered. But nobody knows when it reaches zero.
- I. If you subtract the Second Coming from your view of history, if you subtract the Second Coming from your view of your own life, everything changes radically.
- J. I think this has happened. I think the church has forgotten the Second Coming, and by and large forgotten heaven. Do you know how hard it is to find contemporary worship music written about the Second Coming? It's not easy.
- K. What used to be a big topic is hardly talked about any more, or if it is talked about, it's so loaded with weirdness nobody wants to listen.

V. Through the years

- A. Eschatology became a hot topic when a classic book hit the stands. It was 1970 and the book sold over 35 million copies during its long career. It's called *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey.
- B. This launched prophecy conferences with huge charts deciphering the endgame rollout. Christians either loved it or hated it.
- C. In 1972, a movie was released called *Thief in the Night*. I saw it several times as a kid, and it scared me and everyone else I knew so we would be ready for the return of Jesus.
- D. Prophecy was big in the church and it was big in American culture too. But like all fads, it faded away.
- E. But then, in 1995, a series of books hit the shelves called *Left Behind*. It ended up being 16 novels, written over 12 years by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. This sparked a resurgence in interest in the Second Coming, along with some movies that turned off as many people as they turned on.
- F. But once again interest faded away, and hasn't come back since. I think that's our loss.
- G. When you understand what it means to say that Jesus is coming again, it changes you. And that's why I wanted to do this study.
- H. So let's look at some of the places where the Bible says Jesus will come again. And then we'll talk about what difference it makes in our lives.

VI. At the Ascension

- A. *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)*
 1. So this happens after the resurrection of Jesus. After he has shown himself alive many times, in many places, to many many people. They have come together, and ask him this question.
 2. Their question shows they were expecting a kingdom for Israel, headed by King Jesus. That's really, really important. It's important because one of the most ancient promises God ever made was to give a kingdom to Israel, which will be ruled by a Son of Abraham, Son of David — let's call him Jesus — and will usher in a golden age.

3. That promise has never been fulfilled. It's still outstanding — a kind of divine IOU not only to Israel, but to the world.
 4. So they ask this of Jesus, and he doesn't correct their question. He just says he's not ready to answer the "when" part of their question.
- B. *And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:7, 8)*
1. So, yes, I am going to establish such a kingdom. No, I will not tell you when.
 2. Yes, in the mean time, here are your marching orders: go everywhere you can and help people find and follow God. Be my witnesses.
 3. And your power for this will be the Holy Spirit. The Son of God, in his human body, will be gone. But the Spirit of God will be with you. And every single time you communicate the gospel, the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit will be there, working to bring salvation into the house.
 4. Now, watch what happens next.
- C. *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. (Acts 1:9)*
1. One minute, Jesus is talking, the next minute, he's a foot off the ground. Then two feet. Then ten feet. Then he's a tiny speck. Then a cloud eats him and his gone.
 2. This is called the Ascension. Jesus ascended to heaven. That is where he is today, in his bodily form. Spiritually, he is with us. But bodily, he is in heaven. In heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the throne of majesty. And all of heaven is on tiptoe for something big to happen.
 3. What's that you say?
- D. *And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10, 11)*
1. Jesus as just ascended to heaven. The disciples are staring at the sky. Nobody says anything. They've all become a bunch of slack-jawed mouth breathers.
 2. And these two bystanders in white apparel... probably angels... basically say, you have your orders, quit standing around.
 3. And the make this promise:
 - a) This same Jesus... their friend. The person they knew. The person who died and rose again. This one.
 - b) Who was taken up from you into heaven... which they all just awe...
 - c) *Will so come...* You guys, we know your circuits are pretty fried right now because he's gone, but no freaking out. He's coming back. He will come again. How will he come again?
 - d) He will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven... He went up to heaven visibly, and when he comes back, he will come back visibly. He went up to heaven bodily, and when he comes back, he will return bodily — we're not just talking a spiritual resurrection of some sort. He went up to heaven literally, and when he comes back, he will come back literally.
 4. This is the promise of God. It is repeated in hundreds and hundreds of places in Scripture. And it is always the same. Jesus is coming again.
 5. One more place, and we'll land this ship.
- VII. Jesus with his disciples.
- A. *Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:1-3)*
1. So there it is again. Jesus told them he was going. He was going to prepare a place for all who believe in him — described here as many mansions. As long as mine has a bass pond, I'm happy.
 2. Jesus knew that when he left, his friends would be depressed. So he told them not to be troubled, not to be discouraged. Why not? Because a) of what he was doing while he was gone — which was awesome, and b) he said, I will come again. I will come again and receive you unto myself. Where I am, there you may be also.
 3. Which is to say, that whatever distance exists between you and Jesus in his resurrection body — that distance will one day go away. When? When he comes again.
 4. And that day will come.
 5. It can happen today. It can happen tomorrow. It can happen a hundred years from now. Nobody knows.
 6. So let me lay five major themes of Bible prophecy, and we will be done.
- VIII. Major Themes
- A. *SPIRITUAL WARFARE: Much of what is played out in Bible prophecy is the result of spiritual warfare.*
1. By spiritual warfare, I mean the profound and creepy conflict between God and the devil.
 2. The devil basically said, God I can do just as good a job as you in ruling this world.
 3. So ever since he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, the devil has basically been clutching the scepter of earth, like his own little "my precious."
 4. So all the end time wars, and the violence, and the cruelty, and the AntiChrist, and the extreme saturation of evil into modern culture... all of that is Satan shooting at God in a war he has no chance of winning but just won't quit.

5. But, he is a master at deception, and many will be sucked into his lies.
6. Angels are involved. Demons are involved. An unseen realm. The conflict of the ages. This is a really big deal.
7. And let me say this...
 - a) Even if Jesus doesn't return for another hundred years, the forces of good and evil, and the great cosmic conflict, are already being played out today.
 - b) You can't hide from this stuff. It's affecting our lives. It's affecting our kids' lives every single day.
8. The events of eschatology will show every person's true colors, whose side they are on, and will silence the devil's foolish claims forever.
9. So a second related theme is this one:
 - B. *JUDGMENT: The Bible prophesies there will be several judgments poured out during the end times.*
 1. Each judgment has a specific reason, and a specific target. Some judgments are for unbelievers. Some judgments are for believers. Some take place on earth. Some take place in heaven or at the gates of hell.
 2. But what is happening in all of them is the same:
 3. God is balancing the scales of justice once for all, forever.
 4. Every time you have ever wondered about the justice of God... every time you have decided that the universe just isn't fair... every single one of those complaints will be adjudicated and put to rest and silenced in the judgments of the last day.
 5. Because in that day, no one, not even one person, not even the devil, will have any ground of complaint against the righteousness of God, not even a peep, forevermore.
 6. All I can say is thank God for the gospel of grace, and that as a child of God, my judgment day already happened the day Jesus died on the Cross... and that means my judgment day will be the day I step into my full reward and the inheritance of grace in heaven.
 - C. *ISRAEL: Israel occupies center stage in biblical eschatology.*
 1. Why? Because the endgame of God is about how he fulfills really ancient promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.
 2. He promised them a land. He promised them a kingdom. He promised them universal dominion. He promised them an everlasting king. All of that will be fulfilled by Jesus. But, like I said, it is still an IOU from God to Israel.
 3. And because all these things are to happen through Israel, and through the Jews, — supremely through Christ — the devil hates God's chosen people. Always has. Always will. Biblically speaking, anti-semitism is demonic.
 4. God told Abraham, I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you, and the devil has been doing a whole lot of cursing for four thousand years.
 5. The stage for the Antichrist, for the Battle of Armageddon, and for a great end-times revival... all of that is Israel. And the eyes of the world are fastened there, in that tiny sliver of land because the devil is fixated on getting God to break even one of his promises.
 - D. *HEAVEN: The end times fully prepare the world for heaven — the eternal state of glory and grace designed by God since before the worlds were made.*
 1. The Bible speaks of three heavens, or three heavenly spheres. The first heavens is the sky and atmosphere that surrounds the earth, where the birds fly.
 2. The second heavens is the starry sky, outer space. The Bible speaks of the "stars of the heavens" (Gen 26:4, Rev 6:13).
 3. By creating man and woman, and commanding them to fill the earth, God has populated this planet, which is connected with the first heavens.
 4. By creating myriads of angels, God has populated the second heavens.
 5. But the location of the third heavens has never been revealed or unfolded in scripture. It is the place of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 6. When the Son of God was born into this earth, he left the third heavens, passed through the second heavens, and came down to this first heavens — where he becomes lower than the angels (Ps 8:5).
 7. But when he returned into heaven, he ascended back into the third heavens, and he did so not just as God, but as the God-man.
 8. When a believer in Jesus dies, they go at once to be with Christ. They pass through all the heavens to the highest heaven, the third heavens. All believers will be brought into that place of glory at the coming of the Lord. The third heavens is being populated right now.
 9. Salvation is God's way of outfitting people like us for that heavenly sphere.
 10. And everything we do, and everything we don't do... the choices we make here every single day, will have an impact on the glories we will experience there.
 - a) *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20).*
 11. And that is why I'm preaching this series.