

Lesson #5: See God's Signs

Seven Lessons of Revelation

Matthew 24:3-14; Revelation 14:1-20

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You remember the movie *Forrest Gump*? Forrest was mentally-slow, but excelled in virtue and life. A story has Forrest appearing at heaven's gates. St. Peter says: "*Forrest, you must answer three questions correctly to prove you've been a good steward of the education God provided you. Question #1: what two days of the week begin with the letter T? Question #2: how many seconds are in a year? Question #3: tell me two of God's names?*" Forrest thought a while and answered: "*The two days of the week beginning with T are today and tomorrow. There are 12 seconds in a year, and we call God Howard and Andy.*" St. Peter responded, "*Forrest, I'll give credit for today and tomorrow, but explain 12 seconds.*" Forrest began with a drawl, "*Well, there's January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd...*" Peter interrupted, "*Ok! Where did you learn your names for God?*" "*My church,*" said Forrest, "*we pray 'Our Father... Howard be thy name,' and we sing 'Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me...'*" Peter swung open the gate.

Thankfully, there is no test of intellect to enter heaven. We may be tempted to think we need a giant intellect to benefit from the book of Revelation. Many Christians vacillate between two extremes: obsessing about prophetic schemes or dismissing Revelation as irrelevant.

First, the book was not written for the gifted intellectual, but for anyone who believes. Second, the book of Revelation is exceedingly important and practical.

For some of you, I've been with your loved ones at the end of their lives. I've heard them talk to you. I've heard them say what they want you to remember. I've witnessed them speak what is most important to them. That is true of last words.

In Jesus' last conversation with his disciples, he spoke of his return. Similarly, when the Holy Spirit gave us the last book of the Bible, he emphasized Jesus' return. Four times in Revelation, Jesus says, "*I am coming soon.*" Three times in the final chapter! When Christians say that Christ is coming soon, they simply affirm what Jesus promised and emphasized. They also affirm what the apostles believed and taught.

James, Christ's brother, wrote in his epistle:

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:8-9, NIV)

"Standing at the door" was how near James believed Christ's return was. He told his readers to watch their behavior because of who is about to come. St. Paul and the Apostle John carry that same expectation in their letters. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews declared:

...in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay. (Hebrews 10:37, NIV)

Does it sound like Jesus' return is near? Peter wrote in his 1st epistle:

The end of all things is near. (1 Peter 4:7, NIV)

And in 2 Peter he wrote:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to

repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. (2 Peter 3:9-10, NIV)

Peter corrects the notion that believers should stop expecting Christ's return because of a delay. Jesus addresses that notion in Matthew 25 when he tells the parable of ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom. There is a delay and five foolish virgins did not prepare for it. They miss the return of the bridegroom.

The prevailing theme of the New Testament is that *this Jesus who paid for your sins on the cross and broke the power of death in resurrection is returning very soon. Therefore, get ready!* It is clear then that God wants his people to live in expectation of Jesus' return. Why? We'll find that out in the next few minutes.

In the bulletin insert I've identified for you five scriptures that depict Christ's return. In 1 Thessalonians Paul describes the call of an angel, the sound of a trumpet and Christian believers rising into the clouds to meet Christ and those who died in the faith. We call this *the rapture*. Imagine sleeping, walking, or working and then zip, being raptured. Everybody say it, "rapture!"

In the book of Acts, angels tell Jesus's disciples that Christ will come back in the same way that they saw him ascend in their presence. How did they see him leave? Zip, up in the air! Rapture!

The gospel of Matthew reveals that Jesus will return in the clouds with power and glory, dispatching his angels with a trumpet call to gather his faithful from wherever they are. Do you think the angels will transport us in a car or plane? It sounds like zip, up in the air. Rapture!

In the fourth passage, one looking like the Son of Man, sitting in a white cloud, waves his sickle and harvests the earth. Finally, in the 19th chapter of Revelation, Christ appears as a

warrior king with the armies of heaven, to liberate and judge the nations.

Each scripture pictures a decisive moment in history. In each case, life ends as we know it; and a totally new beginning arises. Because these accounts seem so fantastic, so different, so extreme, many people blow them off.

I had trouble finding clip art to depict Christ's return. That would not be the case if it was a theme in our lives. The extreme difference gives Christ's return its importance. Daily focusing on Jesus' return radically reshapes our perspective. We see things differently, evaluate things differently, and then act differently. We no longer live as mere thermometers of our culture. Our vision and focus make us seers, prophets, and world-changers. Our hope purifies our thinking and thus our life from worldly clutter.

God gave us the book of Revelation so that you would see and think differently. God wants you to think every day and every moment in terms of Christ's return. God wants you to look at life with a sensitivity to that which signals Christ's approach and the ultimate redemption of creation.

Some people take this to an extreme. They propose specific dates or discontinue important activities because they think Christ's return is so near. They forget the lesson of the five virgins who were unprepared for a delay. The Apostle Paul confronted the false notion that Christ had already returned. He told believers in 2 Thessalonians that a rebellion along with a specific leader who promotes lawlessness and false worship must appear and gain world-wide acceptance before Christ comes. These signs must be in place, so it is important to learn the signs, so we won't be deceived.

Jesus taught the same thing. He warned of false reports and imposters. He warned of

misinterpreting the immanence of war, the presence of famines and earthquakes. He listed several signs and then he gave a final one. Do you know the final sign of Jesus' return? He told his disciples:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14, NIV)

In the fourteenth chapter of Revelation, the Apostle John saw an angel fly after Christ opened the seventh and final seal of the scroll of redemption and the seventh and final trumpet sounded. He saw the angel fly. It was carrying the gospel to every nation, tribe, language and people of this planet. That is the key.

God loves this world. Before he judges it, he has decreed that the gospel we carry as believers must be shared with all he loves. Revelation shows God unfolding his judgment in a way to maximize the witness given to humanity so that as many as possible turn to God.

Do you see what is unfolding among the nations? Do you see the irrational hatred for Israel and hear the vows of powerful people to eliminate them? Do you see the threat of nuclear confrontation with North Korea and Iran? Do you note disasters and the cooling of Western hearts toward God and his Word?

We live under a threatening sky. The Holy Spirit wants you to know that Jesus is at the door. With Jesus near, you don't need to fear. He has you here to make a difference and share his amazing love. Realize that your vindication comes soon. You could very well live to see your feet gain flight, the clouds come near and victory over all evil and death appear.

Are you living your life with that in mind? Do your priorities reflect the reality that Jesus is coming soon? Can you be easily deceived or do you know the signs? Know that Jesus is

coming soon! Know that means the end of death! Get to work and heed the signs!