

The End of This Age

by Zac Poonen

The sermon discusses the end of this age, including the signs of Christ's coming, the first and second resurrections, and the final judgment, emphasizing the call to overcome and live a life of fellowship with God.

Scripture: Hebrews 2:14

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Overcoming Faith"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the clarity Jesus brought to the understanding of life after death and God's future plans, contrasting Old Testament ambiguity with New Testament revelation. He reassures believers that death is not to be feared, as Jesus has conquered it, and outlines the immediate destinations of souls after death: Heaven or Hell. Poonen discusses the signs of Christ's imminent return, the transformation of believers at the resurrection, and the subsequent judgment where faithfulness will be rewarded. He concludes with a vision of the Millennium and the final judgment, urging believers to live as overcomers in light of eternity.

Transcript

There was no clear understanding in Old Testament times about life after death and about God's plan for the future. But Jesus taught very clearly about both these matters. It's good for us to know about these matters too.

After Death What?

Death has no terror for a disciple of Christ, for Jesus has conquered death. Death is a defeated enemy. Jesus died and made Satan powerless thereby so that we need no longer have any fear of death (Heb. 2:14,15). The keys of death are now in the hand of Jesus (Rev. 1:18). Only He can open the door of death for any of His disciples now. Satan can't touch them.

What happens when a man dies? Jesus answered this question clearly when He spoke about the rich man and Lazarus. It would be good if you read Luke 16:19-31 right now, before proceeding any further.....

This is not a parable - for in no parable did Jesus ever use a man's name as he did here. Both the rich man and Lazarus were real people.

Jesus made it clear here that there are only two places to which the dead go. One is Heaven (also called 'Abraham's bosom' or 'Paradise') - a place of comfort; and the other is Hell - a place of torture and suffering. As soon as a person dies, his soul goes immediately to one of these places, even before his body is buried on earth. And even though he doesn't have a body, yet he will be conscious of his surroundings and of comfort or pain.

Man is a threefold being, consisting of spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23). At death the soul and spirit are separated from the body, and go either to paradise or to hell.

While on the cross, Jesus told the repentant thief that he would be with Him in paradise that very day. Both Jesus and that thief went to paradise as soon as their souls left their bodies. Jesus had said that after His death, He would be in 'the heart of the earth' for 3 days and 3 nights (Matt. 12:40). From this we know that paradise, at that time, must have been in the heart of the earth. But when Christ was resurrected "from the lower parts of the earth.... and ascended on high.. He led captive a host of captives" (Eph. 4:8,9). He took paradise and all the souls in it up to the third heaven.

In 2 Corinthians 12, when we compare verses 2 and 4 together, we see that paradise is now located in the third heaven. This is where the disciple of Jesus goes as soon as he dies (Phil. 1:23).

The Signs of Christ's Coming

The Bible tells us of a number of events that would take place immediately before Christ's return to earth. Here are some of them:

(1) Wars, famines and earthquakes (Matt. 24:7). These have been there on earth at all times. But there has been a great increase in their number since the Second World War (1939-1945).

(2) A sudden spurt of knowledge and a vast increase in worldwide travel (Dan. 12:4). Both of these have also been seen in a far greater measure during the last fifty years than ever before.

(3) Men will be lovers of pleasure (2 Tim. 3:4). Immorality is a specially evil characteristic of our times. Pornographic movies and video-tapes have all served Satan's purposes in promoting immorality.

(4) Men will be arrogant, revilers and disobedient to parents (2 Tim. 3:2-4). Today we see the spirit of rebellion all around us - in homes, in schools, in colleges and in factories.

(5) Believers will fall away from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1). We see this too in our day, with the wide proliferation of many cults, to which many believers are falling a prey.

(6) The rebirth of the nation of Israel (the fig tree - a symbol of Israel - putting forth its leaves - Lk. 21:29-32). Ever since A.D.70, the Jews had been scattered around the world. This fig tree lay withered for nearly 19 centuries thereafter. But in May 1948, the nation of Israel was born once again. Jesus said that Jerusalem would be occupied by non-Jewish nations until the times of those nations are fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). In June 1967, Israel occupied the city of Jerusalem, for the first time in 20 centuries.

It is exciting to see what is happening in the world today. The signs are all pointing to the coming of Christ very soon.

The First Resurrection and the Judgment Seat of Christ

When Christ comes, all who belong to Him will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. We will receive new bodies that can never age or die (1 Cor. 15:51-53). Our new bodies will be just like the body that Jesus Himself had after His resurrection (Phil. 3:20,21). Those who died in Christ will also arise from their graves in their new bodies and along with the living disciples of Jesus at that time, will rise into the air to meet the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

Then Christ will set up His judgment seat, at which we will be judged (assessed) and rewarded individually for our faithfulness in our earthly lives.

The Bible speaks of crowns being awarded in that day for those who have been faithful. You could read 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and 4:5; 2 Timothy 4:8 and 1 Peter 5:4 for more details of the rewards that will be given by the Lord to His disciples at that time.

In that day, we will see that "many who are first will be last and the last, first " (Matt. 19:30). Many who appeared to us to be very spiritual on earth, will then be seen as not having been so faithful in God's eyes. Others whom we may not have thought too highly of, will then be seen as having been faithful in God's eyes. In that day, the unknown but faithful widow will take precedence over the world-famous but unfaithful preacher.

In that day, we will discover that many things such as money and fame, that men considered valuable on earth have no value before God; and that many virtues that men did not value, such as purity, humility, unselfishness, mercy and goodness are valued greatly by God.

Then will take place what the Bible calls 'the marriage of the Lamb of God' - the spiritual marriage of Jesus Christ with His Bride - the ones who were faithful in denying themselves and taking up the cross daily and following Him as His disciples on earth (Rev. 19:8-10). In that day we will see that it was worth it all to have suffered misunderstanding, shame, persecution and even death itself for the sake of our Lord and His gospel.

The Millennium

A reign of peace will then begin for 1000 years, when Garden of Eden conditions will prevail on the earth, with the lion lying down peacefully with the lamb and the child playing with the harmless cobra etc., (Isa. 11:6-9).

Jesus will then reign from Jerusalem as King over the whole earth (Zechariah 14:9-21). Satan will be bound during those years so that he has no access to earth as he has now. At the end of those 1000 years, Satan will be released for a short period to test the unconverted inhabitants of earth once more. Again a great multitude will follow after Satan. This will be God's demonstration to angels and men that these people do not want Christ to reign over them, even after they have seen the 1000 years of peace. Such is man's blindness and stubbornness and wickedness. But God will come down in judgment on that rebellious multitude; and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire (which is just a larger version of hell - Rev. 20:7-10).

The Second Resurrection and the Final Judgment

God will then set up His judgment seat to judge all unbelievers. This will be the second resurrection. The dead will be raised from their graves. The souls of all unbelievers will return from hell into their earthly bodies to stand before God to be judged. They will then be judged "from the things which were written in

the books, according to their deeds" (Rev. 20:12).

Memory is like a video-tape that faithfully records everything that we have thought, said and done and also our attitudes and motives throughout our earthly life. God will in that day play back this tape for the whole world to see the hidden lives of everyone. This will be God's way of showing that He is perfectly righteous in sending people into eternal judgment.

Those whose names are not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire to join Satan whom they served on earth (Rev. 20:15).

The End of Time

Then time will cease and eternity will begin. Redeemed men and women will enter into the new heaven and the new earth and the bride of Christ will then shine forth in all her glory (as described in Revelation 21).

Satan and all unbelievers will have been removed from that perfect heaven and earth. In that glorious new universe, sin will never raise its ugly head any more and there won't be any lusts in our flesh. Heaven will be filled with people who have joyfully chosen the will of God for all eternity.

The Call to Overcome

Peter says, "Since all these things (the existing heavens and earth) are to be destroyed, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Pet. 3:11,12).

The message of the Spirit in these last days, can be summed up in one word : "OVERCOME " (See Rev.2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12,21; 21:7).

We began this book by emphasising the missing element in much of today's preaching to unbelievers - REPENT.

We conclude this book by emphasising the missing element in much of today's preaching to believers - OVERCOME.

The call of God to man, ever since he fell into sin has been to be an overcomer. God told Cain, "Sin is crouching at your (heart's) door...but you must master it" (Gen.4:7). In the last book of the Bible that call is repeated, "He who overcomes shall inherit these things and I will be his God and he will be My son" (Rev. 21:7).

Nothing on earth can be compared with the glory of a life lived in fellowship with God and in the fulfillment of His purposes. The life that Jesus lived on earth was the most wonderful, the most glorious and the happiest life that any man ever lived. He wasn't world-famous or rich. But He radiated the glory of God through His life.

The good news of the gospel is that you can radiate that glory too. You can be an overcomer all the days of your earthly life. May you be faithful then and live with eternity's values in view at all times. Amen.

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