

## Lecture 13: Eschatology

**“This is our final lecture,”** Professor Grimes announced to his class. “Next week we have the finals, and then you will receive your grades and this school will be razed to the ground. I suspect that many of you will be unhappy with your grades, but that is your doing, not mine. You will be judged based on the choices that you made. If you made poor choices then you can expect to receive poor results.”

Brad spoke up. “You do realize that our grades don’t make any difference, right? No one is ever going to care how well we did in this class. We’re all going to have to switch to a new school next semester, and the credits for this joke of a class don’t transfer. So even if we did well it wouldn’t matter.”

“Let’s stop and think about that,” Professor Grimes said. “The reason you were required to take this class in the first place is because your knowledge of Christianity was

so poor that you had no chance of passing any other theological class you would ever take. If you took this class and passed it then that would mean you had learned enough to have a fighting chance of passing other classes in the future. However, if you failed this class then that means there is no hope for you. It is time you found a different career, because theological knowledge is beyond your grasp.”

Wally spoke up. “That kind of sounds like an insult.”

“Really? Tell me something. Is it insulting if I tell you that you cannot flap your arms and fly off into the sunset?”

“That is the weirdest thing I’ve ever heard. Isn’t it, like, totally obvious that I can’t do that?”

“I would certainly hope so,” the professor replied. “Telling you that you cannot do something *that you actually cannot do* is not insulting; it is something you need to hear. If you cannot pass this class then the reality is you will not be able to pass any other classes in your major. Since that is the case, you need to either take this class again and actually pay attention this time, or else you need to find

another line of work. Those are your options.”

The professor turned his attention to his notes. “As I was saying, in this class we are going to take a brief, high-level look at the doctrine of eschatology. Eschatology is the study of last things – specifically the return of Christ, the events surrounding the return of Christ, and what happens after the return of Christ. This is a critical field of study.”

Brad spoke up. “C’mon, professor. With you *everything* is a ‘critical field of study’.”

“That is because the whole purpose of this class is to teach you the critical doctrines of Christianity! Everything I am teaching you is, in fact, of great importance. That is the whole reason I am trying to teach it to you.”

“I don’t know,” Wally said. “All of this end-times stuff is controversial, and I don’t know that it really matters. It doesn’t really affect me and it’s all going to pan out in the end anyway. Why bother studying it at all?”

“Ah, yes, the famous ‘pan-millennial’ position,” Professor Grimes said. “Tell me, Wally. When you read a book, do you skip the final few chapters on the grounds that the ending of the story doesn’t really matter?”

“I don’t read books,” Wally replied.

“Given your grades I can’t say that I’m surprised. But the point is people *care* about how stories end. They become unhappy if their TV show or movie cuts off before it comes to its conclusion. In the real world *the ending matters*. How is it that you care a great deal about the final moments of a meaningless TV show, and yet are completely uninterested in the ending of history itself?”

“It’s not that big a deal,” Brad said. “God wins in the end. Do we really need to know more than that?”

“Well, *God* obviously thought you did,” Professor Grimes replied. “If prophecy didn’t matter then He would never have put it in the Bible to begin with. An astonishing 27% of the Bible is actually prophecy – which works out to 8,352 verses that cover that topic. 62 of the 66 books of the Bible talk about prophecy, and all nine New Testament authors discuss it. Aside from the subjects of salvation and faith, the most prominent theme in the New Testament is the Second Coming of Jesus

Christ.<sup>38</sup> The fact that God spent *that much time* talking about the subject is a pretty good indication that it *matters* and that God wants us to care about it. In fact, Revelation 1:3 says there is actually a special blessing for people who read Revelation and pay attention to it.

“There is also the fact that in Matthew 24:3 when Christ’s disciples asked Him about this subject, He did not say ‘Hey, guys, it doesn’t really matter. Just focus on kingdom stuff and you’ll be fine.’ No, instead He answered their question in great detail and told them to watch, be alert, and pay attention so they would not be deceived.”

“Deceived about what?” Iris asked.

“Deceived by liars and false prophets. Just think about all the people who have proclaimed that Jesus was going to return on a certain day. A great many false teachers have made predictions during the past two thousand years, and many people have been deceived. Countless lives have been ruined because people didn’t know what the Bible

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<sup>38</sup> *Christ's Prophetic Plans*, by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue

actually taught, and as a result were led astray.”

Wally spoke up. “But anyone who was fooled by those predictions was just being really dumb. It was obvious those teachers were batty.”

“How so?” Professor Grimes asked.

“Because, like, every time someone makes a prediction like that, it’s wrong.”

“But how do you know that they’re not going to be right this time?”

Wally shrugged. “They just aren’t. It never happens.”

Professor Grimes sighed. “By that same logic, you could say that since you haven’t died yet it’s obvious that you will never die at all! If you don’t know what the Bible teaches then you are a prime target for being deceived. But *you*, Wally, have chosen a path that is even worse than being mistaken. You have decided to protect yourself by not caring at all. Of all the positions that you could possibly take, God considers ‘not caring about what He said’ to *be worse than being wrong*. In fact, in Revelation 3:15-16 Jesus said that attitude makes Him want to vomit.”

“That’s totally gross,” Wally said.

“So is your attitude toward Scripture. As Christians we do not have the option of saying ‘I’m going to care about these doctrines, but I’m not going to care about those’. God requires you to care about *everything* that He said – and He said repeatedly that His return is of great importance. In fact, one of the very first things mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer is a request that God’s millennial kingdom would begin so that His will would be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

Brad spoke up. “But all this stuff is such a pain to study, and there are so many different opinions. I still don’t see how it actually affects me anyway. Can’t we just be prepared for Jesus to return and leave it at that?”

“That’s a good question,” Professor Grimes said. “Tell me something, young man: what, exactly, are you preparing for? Preterism teaches that Jesus already came back, so people who believe that aren’t looking for Him to return at all. Dominionism teaches that Christ isn’t going to come back until the church conquers the Earth, so they’re preparing for a massive revival that

puts the church in charge of every government. People who are post-tribulational believe that they are going to have to live through the reign of the antichrist, so they're preparing for Hell on Earth. People who are pre-tribulational believe that Jesus could return at any moment to take them to Heaven, so they are looking for the imminent return of Christ.

"As you can see, there is no such thing as 'just be prepared'. Your end-times view determines what you think is going to happen in the future, and that impacts the way you live your life. It should be obvious that someone who thinks that all Hell is about to break loose is going to make different choices from someone who expects that, any day now, the Church will take over the world and usher in an age of total peace and happiness."

Iris spoke up. "But there are so many different theories. How can you possibly tell who is right and who is wrong? Aren't there smart people on all sides?"

"No matter how smart they may be, two opinions that contradict each other cannot both be right. They *can* both be wrong,



however – and smart people are wrong all the time. Yes, it is true that there are many different views. In order to find out who is right, you just do what people have always done when there are multiple contradictory opinions: you analyze the evidence and determine who is right and who is wrong. I agree that it is hard, and it does take time. But it is *not* impossible.

“There are four basic eschatological views. The one that you have probably never heard of before is Preterism. Preterism teaches that the book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. They teach that Jesus returned at that time, and no one realized it until almost two thousand years later. Even His own disciples completely missed His return.”

“Really?” Iris asked.

“Yes, really. In fact, there are two flavors of Preterism. Full preterism teaches that not only has Jesus already come back, but the dead have been raised and the final judgment has already happened. They believe that Jesus isn’t going to come back because He

already came back thousands of years ago. As you can imagine, most people have an extremely hard time taking that view seriously. Partial preterists teach that while Jesus has come back, He came back in a secret way that went unnoticed by everybody, and the raising of the dead is still in the future.”

“That’s really strange,” iris said. “Do people really believe that?”

“Yes, they do – even though preterism is very easy to disprove. Remember, preterism teaches that the events prophesied in Revelation were fulfilled in 70 AD. In order for this interpretation to be true, Revelation must have been written *before* 70 AD. After all, if it was written *after* 70 AD and was prophesying events that were still in the future when it was written, then preterism is clearly false. As it turns out, the early church father Irenaeus (who lived from 120-202 AD) recorded that Revelation was written in the early 90s – twenty years *after* 70 AD. Not only did the early church record that date, but the book itself testifies to it as well. Revelation 1:9 says that the apostle John wrote the book while imprisoned on Patmos, and history

records that John was sent there by the Emperor Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96 AD. Revelation 2:13 also speaks of the martyrdom of Antipas, who was killed in 92 AD. All of this means that Revelation could not possibly have been written before 70 AD, which means that preterism is wrong. So that is one view that we can eliminate.

“The second view, which is also fairly uncommon, is the historical view. It holds that the book of Revelation is a portrayal of various major historical events that take place between Christ’s ascension and Christ’s return. People who hold to that view spend a great deal of time studying Revelation and trying to connect its verses to events throughout history.”

“That makes sense,” Brad said.

“But it is deeply flawed,” Professor Grimes said. “First of all, it is very difficult to find events that correspond to what Revelation says. It’s also very arbitrary – it is up to *you* to decide what events Revelation might be talking about. That brings up the second problem: 2 Peter 1:20 makes it clear that no Scripture has a private interpretation.

You are not allowed to use things outside of the Bible to interpret Biblical symbolism. When the Bible uses symbolism, you have to interpret that symbol by finding the passage *in the Bible* that defines what that symbol means, and then you use that definition. You can never, ever assign your own interpretation to symbols. You have to use the interpretation that God provided.”

“Hold on,” Iris said. “Are you saying that the Bible actually explains itself?”

“That’s exactly what I mean, and that is where the historical view goes wrong. Instead of using the Bible’s interpretation, it comes up with its own. That is why it fails – and that removes two of the four possibilities. That leaves only two left: amillennialism and premillennialism.”

“That’s a real mouthful,” Isaac commented.

“True, but the terms are meaningful once you understand them. Both terms come from the idea of the Millennium – the time spoken of in Revelation 20, when Jesus will reign over the world and usher in a thousand years of piece. The a-millennial view teaches

that the Millennium is symbolic of the period we are living in now – the Church Age – and that the book of Revelation is a symbolic look at the struggle between good and evil. People who are amillennial don't believe that there will be a real antichrist, or Mark of the Beast, or anything like that. They think it's just symbolic – kind of like an allegory.

“The pre-millennial view is just the opposite. People who hold to that view believe that when Jesus returns, He will establish a literal kingdom on Earth and will rule over the world as a king for a thousand years. They believe that there will be an actual antichrist and a real Mark of the Beast. They believe that the judgments in Revelation – things like destroying all life in the sea, an earthquake that levels all cities, and a rain of 70-pound hailstones – are real events that are going to happen during a terrible seven-year period called the Tribulation.

“As you can see, these two views are radically different. They cannot both be correct.”

“So which one is right?” Iris asked.

“Well, let's examine the details and find

out. Since these two views have a completely different interpretation of Revelation 20, let's take a look at that chapter and see what it has to say. If you turn there and read the chapter, the first thing it says is that an angel took Satan, bound him with a great chain, and locked him away in the bottomless pit for a thousand years so he could no longer deceive the nations. After that, the martyrs who were executed for their faith in Christ were raised from the dead, and they reigned with Christ over the nations for a thousand years.

"Now, the amillennial view says that all of this is just symbolic. They say that this passage is talking about Christ's victory over Satan on the cross, and that the Church Age is the same thing as the millennium."

Brad spoke up. "It does sound pretty plausible to me."

Professor Grimes shook his head. "It only sounds plausible if you gloss over all of the details. If Revelation 20 was talking about Christ's victory on the cross then it would say that *the Lamb of God* bound Satan. But it *doesn't say that!* Instead, even though Revelation 19 has a great deal to say about

Jesus, the book *stops* talking about Jesus and says that an angel – *not* Christ – went and bound Satan. That doesn't align with the crucifixion at all! The being who died on that cross and conquered Satan and death itself was *not* an angel, but was Jesus Christ. So that is a serious problem. On top of that, Revelation says that after this event happens Satan is rendered completely harmless. He can no longer deceive the nations or cause any type of harm. He is locked away and removed from the scene.

“Yet I Peter 5:8 tells us that Satan is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Ephesians 6 commands us to be on guard against the devil, because he will destroy us if he can. In Matthew 13:19 Jesus tells us that the devil snatches the Word away from some people who hear the gospel so that they will not be saved. In other words, the devil is a very dangerous enemy who actively deceives and destroys people. This presents a very serious problem for amillennialism, because that theory teaches that Satan has already been bound and rendered utterly harmless! If Satan is bound right now, then being bound

has no meaning whatsoever. It is *completely ridiculous* to think that Satan was bound at the cross and hasn't caused any trouble at all in the past two thousand years. It's just not plausible. Not one of the apostles ever taught that.

"As if that were not enough evidence against amillennialism, there is also the fact that during the millennium the martyrs are raised from the dead and reign with Christ over the world. Yet, in this age, it is ridiculous to say that the martyrs are reigning over anything. The Church has been hated and persecuted for two millennia. This is not an age of peace; it has been an age of martyrdom. The martyrs are *dying*, not reigning! The whole argument of amillennialism falls apart when you look at the details. It just doesn't work."

"But lots of people believe it," Brad said.

"Yes they do. But the truth is that people usually believe the first thing they hear, and then they stick to that for the rest of their lives. You see, very few people actually study their Bibles on their own to find out what it actually teaches. People really aren't that



interested in believing what the Bible has to say; instead they just believe whatever other people tell them to believe. If someone else comes along and says ‘Your beliefs are wrong, and here are the Biblical passages to prove it,’ they will just dismiss them out of hand. Their beliefs are already established and no amount of arguing, evidence, or facts will change their mind.

“It’s really quite sad how little Christians care about what their Bibles actually say. It is common for pastors to refuse to teach certain Bible passages on the grounds that their congregations don’t want to hear it.<sup>39</sup> Many pastors value their jobs far more than they value what God has actually said. I have had Christians tell me that the apostle Paul was wrong.<sup>40</sup> They have told me that they disagree with the Bible. They have their own way of looking at things, and they’re not going to let what God actually said get in the

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<sup>39</sup> I am not making this up. I really have had a pastor tell me “Yes, what you say is true, and I know it is true, but the congregation doesn’t want to hear it so I’m not going to preach it.” This is not uncommon.

<sup>40</sup> Yes, I really have. I’m not making this up either.

way of their beliefs. These people are fools, and they will suffer for their stubborn refusal to listen to God.”

Iris spoke up. “So you’re premillennial, then.”

“That is where the evidence has taken me,” Professor Grimes replied.

Brad spoke up. “But all this rapture stuff is nonsense! You can’t really expect me to believe that one day Jesus will come back and beam us all up, just so Christians won’t have to be persecuted. That view is total garbage. God doesn’t do things like that.”

Professor Grimes sighed. “Haven’t we already talked about this? The Rapture isn’t about escaping *persecution*, young man. The Tribulation is a time when God pours out His wrath upon the world. Being spared the wrath of an angry God is *completely* different from being spared persecution. I Thessalonians 5:9 makes it clear that God has not appointed us to wrath.

“But concerning the topic of God sparing His people, have you not read the Bible? Did you not pay attention in Sunday School? God rescues His people from His wrath all the time!

Before God poured out His wrath upon Sodom and Gomorrah, He sent His angels to remove Lot so that they did not experience His wrath. When God poured out His wrath upon an Egypt that would not let Israel go, He spared the Israelites in Goshen from experiencing His plagues. When Israel marched on the city of Jericho, He—

“But that’s not the same thing,” Brad interrupted. “God didn’t magically beam them up into Heaven. That whole idea is ridiculous.”

“Enoch would disagree with you,” Professor Grimes replied. “In Genesis 5:24 we are told that Enoch walked with God, ‘and then he was not; for God took him’. Hebrews 11:5 explains that since Enoch’s faith pleased God, the Lord translated him so that he would not see death. In other words, God *raptured* him. And when did God do this? Three generations before the Flood came that destroyed the world. In other words, God spared Enoch from experiencing the Flood *by rapturing him*.

“God is going to do exactly the same thing with us. Just as Enoch walked with God,

the Church also walks with God. Just as Enoch had faith, the true Church has faith as well. Revelation 3:10 says that since the true Church was faithful to Christ, Jesus is going to keep them from the hour that would come upon the entire world, to try all those who dwell upon the world. Jesus didn't say that He would keep them safe during that hour, but that He would *keep them from that hour altogether*. That means we're not going to be here when that period happens! Luke 21:34-36 says that the Tribulation will be a snare to everyone in the entire world – but that it is possible to escape that time altogether. How? *By not being here when it happens.*

“1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 paints a very clear picture of what is going to take place: the Lord will return to this world and raise those who are dead in Christ. Then those who are alive in Christ will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and at that point we will ever be with the Lord. Given all the promises that God has made to His people, we know that this takes place before the Tribulation begins.”

Iris spoke up. “But I thought that Jesus returned *after* the Tribulation. Does He come

back twice, or something?”

Professor Grimes glanced at his watch. “That’s a good question. In order to understand the answer you have to know the timeline of end-times events, and that’s a very large subject.<sup>41</sup> I actually teach a course on eschatology, but since this is our last class you’re not going to be able to take it. However, I’ll try to give you a brief summary of what’s going to happen.

“At some point in the future – and no one knows when this will be, which is why it is impossible to pick a date – Jesus will return. As I just explained, He will raise all of those in the Church who have died, and He will convert all living Christians into perfect, immortal beings. These ‘translated’ Christians will meet the Lord in the air, and He will take them back to Heaven – leaving behind all those who were not Christians.

“Some time after this, the being known as the antichrist will sign a seven-year treaty

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<sup>41</sup> I wrote a whole book on this topic: *Even So, Come, Lord Jesus*. This chapter is largely a summary of material from that book.

with Israel. The signing of this treaty will begin the Tribulation – a seven-year period of time that Christ said was the most terrible time there ever was or ever would be. In fact, in Matthew 24:22 He said that if He did not return and put a stop to it, all life on Earth would die.”

“Wow!” Iris exclaimed. “That’s pretty bad.”

“Those seven years will be a truly terrible time. God will judge the world for its wickedness and will pour out His wrath upon the ungodly. But that time has another purpose as well: according to Daniel 9:24, God will use it to put an end to Israel’s sin and bring them to a point of repentance.

“You see, halfway through that terrible time the antichrist will enter the Temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God. Revelation 13 tells us that he will demand that all people worship him, and he will create an idol called the Image of the Beast. The antichrist will demand that everyone worship the image, and he will execute all those who refuse. He will also demand that everyone take the Mark of the Beast. Those

who don't take it will be hunted down and killed – but those who *do* take it will be thrown into the Lake of Fire when Jesus Christ returns.

“While the antichrist carries out his terrible program, Israel will flee to a place of safety and will hide. Millions of people will be saved during that time, and the antichrist will find them and put millions of them to death. Meanwhile, God's judgments will kill more than half of the world's population. There will be death on a scale that the world has never seen.

“At the end of the Tribulation, the antichrist will conquer Jerusalem and march his armies to the remnant of Israel. At that time Israel will realize what they have done. They will repent of rejecting the Messiah and will ask Him to return – and He will do exactly that. Revelation 19 tells us that Jesus will return to Earth with His Church, but His Church will not do any fighting. Instead Jesus will single-handedly kill the antichrist, wipe out his armies, and cast that wicked person into the Lake of Fire.”

Iris spoke up. “So Jesus really is going to

return twice?"

"You are correct. The first time Jesus returns He will rapture His Church. The second time He returns He will rescue Israel and destroy the antichrist and his armies. At that time Christ will round up the remaining population of the world and judge them. Those who refused the Mark and trusted in Christ will be spared. However, Revelation 14:9-11 says all those who took the Mark will be tormented with fire and brimstone forever. When this judgment is over, all the wicked will be gone.

"But this is not the end. Revelation 20 tells us that Jesus will then establish His Kingdom on Earth and will reign as king from Jerusalem over the entire world. All the righteous who have ever died will be raised from the dead, including the martyrs of the tribulation. Jesus will reign on Earth for a thousand years, and Christians will reign with Him. During that time evil will not be tolerated."

"But who would be evil?" Iris asked. "I thought all the wicked were gone!"

"You are forgetting about the children of



the tribulation survivors. Those who survived the Tribulation will go on to repopulate the world, and – unlike those who were raptured and resurrected – these survivors and their children will be tempted to sin. However, the Millennium will be characterized by peace. Isaiah 2:4 tells us that nations will no longer fight against other nations. Habakkuk 2:14 says that the knowledge of God will cover the world as the waters cover the sea. Wickedness will not be tolerated, for Christ will rule with a rod of iron – and the devil will be locked away and unable to cause any trouble.

“But that is not the end either. Revelation 20:7-10 tells us that after a thousand years of peace, the devil will be set free. He will deceive the nations and convince the world to rebel against God. Satan will go all over the world and gather a mighty army, with the intent of attacking God Himself. But he will fail. God will send down fire from Heaven and consume the devil’s army – and will then cast Satan himself into the Lake of Fire.

“That is when the final judgment happens. Revelation 20:11-15 says that God

will take all of the wicked out of Hell and will judge them for everything they have done. All of the righteous – whose names are written in the Book of Life – will be set free. However, the rest will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where all those who rejected Christ will burn for all of eternity. Death itself will be destroyed, and no one will die anymore.”

Iris spoke up. “And *that’s* the end?”

“Oh no!” Professor Grimes replied. “Revelation 21 says that after these things God will destroy this universe and create a new one. This new Heaven and Earth will be a perfect place. Revelation 21:4 says that in that world there will be no more crying, or pain, or death. The world will be populated by perfect immortals. There will be no wicked there, and the devil will never be set free again. As if all that were not enough, since there will never again be sin in the world, God will move to Earth and will live there with His people. Throughout all the ages of eternity God and Man will live together in perfect harmony on the new Earth that He will create.”

Iris spoke up. “So you’re saying that we are going to spend eternity living on *Earth*?”

“Exactly! Only it will be a much, much better world than this one – it will be perfect in every way.”

“And *that* is the end?”

Professor Grimes shook his head. “It’s only the beginning. The Bible says that for all of eternity we will serve God by reigning over His creation. We are a race of kings, and Revelation 22:5 tells us that we will rule with Christ for all of eternity. Isaiah 9:7 says that Christ’s kingdom will continue to grow *forever*. If anything, the New Earth is where things are going to get very interesting. That is when we will begin to embrace our eternal destiny.

“And that is where I must stop. Don’t forget – next week is finals week. There won’t be a lecture next time but there *will* be an exam, and if you do not take that exam you cannot possibly pass this class. I’ll expect to see all of you there. Class dismissed!”

