

## A Pastoral Response to End Times Questions

Text: **Revelation 22:20-21 (NIV)**

March 9, 2021

Northpoint Bible College Chapel

### Introduction

#### A. Opening Comments:

- 1) Thank you, Dr. Howell, President Arnett...always a privilege and honor to share in a chapel service at Northpoint...
- 2) Greetings to those in my pastoral leadership class...
  - a. ...past, present, future...
  - b. I know I will get a lot of “Amen’s” from my current class today because they have an exam this afternoon...and every “Amen” is worth an extra point on the exam!

#### B. I have been asked to bring a message entitled, “A Pastoral Response to End Times Questions.”

- 1) As I was praying and preparing the message for Northpoint...I felt like the Holy Spirit released me to go ahead and deliver the same message to our church family in Lynnfield...as questions about the end of times are always of interest to some...and especially during times of a once-in-a-century pandemic.
  - a. Kerisha and Caleesea were there on Sunday so they’ve heard the message
  - b. So, they are the only ones allowed to fall asleep while I’m speaking!
- 2) Next Sunday will actually be one year since we had to temporarily shut-down in-person worship services because of the coronavirus...
  - a. And there was a fair bit of panic, fear, and anxiety in the hearts of some at that time...
  - b. In fact, I had someone text me early on...and ask, “Pastor Tim...is this the end?”
    - I was prepared with a good response...
    - I said (pregnant pause here) ... “I don’t know” 😊.
    - And then I went on to say, “I don’t know what the future holds...but I know who holds the future in His hands!”
    - And because I am in a personal relationship with Him...He has promised He will never leave me nor forsake me...even to the end of the age! (**Matthew 28:20, NIV**)

- So, that ought to provide all the comfort, strength, and encouragement any of us will need...regardless of what we face today, tomorrow or this year...should the Lord tarry!

4) Even so...whether from fascination or from fear...people tend to have an inordinate interest in the future...

a. As pastors, we learned a long time ago that if you want to get a good turnout for a Bible study, do one on Daniel and Revelation!

- Much larger than a Bible study on prayer and fasting!
- But to be clear, we SHOULD study biblical prophecy and should study eschatology (“end things”)
- Especially those preparing for fulltime gospel ministry...
- You should be familiar with the four major views of Christian eschatology (Preterism, Historicism, Futurism, Idealism), you should understand the difference between premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism...
- So, that is why we have Bible studies on the subject in our churches and why we have very erudite professors here at Northpoint to help you study these things...

C. But my assignment today is not to bring a professorial response to end times questions...my assignment is to bring a pastoral response to end times questions.

- 1) And as you will discover fairly quickly...my response and approach to these things is pretty simple...in part because I am a simple man.
- 2) But I think I have a couple of important principles to share with us today... and it has to do with recognizing what we know...and what we do not know.
- 3) Let me read a scripture to serve as our springboard text, we’ll pray, get into it.
- 4) **“(20) He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” (Revelation 22:20-21, NIV)**

D. Would you bow your heads and hearts with me for a word of prayer?

E. “A Pastoral Response to End Times Questions”

- 1) My simple and straight-forward approach to the end times can essentially be broken down in two ways...
  - a. There is what we know...
  - b. And there is what we do not know...
  
- 2) Let’s talk about what we do NOT know first...

I. **What We Do NOT Know** (Mention importance of providing outlines)

A) In the gospels, as Jesus deals with questions about the signs of the end of the age and His return...this statement is recorded multiple times. Let me read it from Mark’s account, **Mark 13:32-33 (NIV)**:

**“(32) But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (33) Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come [Will address this part in a moment].”**

1. Twice Jesus says it...No one knows...YOU do not know...
2. And interestingly enough, He says that in the same conversation as He is talking about the signs of the end times...
  - a) So, will there be signs that the end is near – you better believe it! At least for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear!
  - b) But...will we know the specific time, the day or hour, NO!
  
3. And yet...that did not stop Edgar C. Whisenant from writing a book...  
*88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. He sold 4.5M copies!
  - a) When the predicted Rapture did not take place, Whisenant followed with later books with predictions for various dates in 1989, 1993 and 1994.
  - b) Those books did not sell in great quantity 😊.
  - c) Edgar passed on in May of 2001, hopefully he went to heaven, but even if he did, he still doesn’t know when the Lord is going to return because Jesus said only the Father has that information – and He’s not giving any advance notice!

4. And that is just one of hundreds of examples that could be given from history of someone trying to set the time and date of the Lord's return.
- a) Newsflash! You don't know! I don't know! Nobody knows!
  - b) Someone from our congregation called me recently...left a sincere question on my phone...wanting to know if I thought the coronavirus vaccine was the mark of the beast!
    - I texted them back and said, "I hope not! I just got my shot!"
    - Actually, I got my second Pfizer shot last week, so hopefully I'm in good shape (the Pfizer vaccine not coming from any of the vaccine strains related to aborted fetal tissues!)
  - c) I talked with a very mature and seasoned minister not too long ago, who told me about an asteroid, I think it's called Apophis...
    - He had been reading the book of a prophecy teacher who said that Nasa had confirmed that this asteroid might hit the earth on 4/13/29.
    - And...and...that this would tie into various anticipated dates for the Great Tribulation, etc.
    - And who knows if it's true or not?
    - But, if the question is, "Do we know when the Lord is going to return," I can answer that question for you, NO ONE KNOWS!

B) Let me give you one more verse about what we do NOT know...and then we will move on to what we DO know!

1. Jesus is talking with His disciples...He's about to ascend to the right hand of the Father...and here is what we read in **Acts 1:6-7 (NIV)**, "**(6) Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."**
2. Don't we love it when Jesus answers our questions sometimes by saying, "Ah...that is not for you to know!" "It's none of your business!"
  - a) I want you to trust Me...
  - b) I want you to serve Me and follow Me and do my work...

3. But then someone like George Whisenant comes along...acts like he has inside-information...and 4.5 million people are gullible enough to buy his book and give him their money!
4. So, when people ask questions about the dates and time of the Lord's Return – the answer is – we do not know!

C) If, on the other hand, the question is, “Are we living in the last days?” or “Are there signs of the times that the Lord's return is nearing?”

1. Well, just read **2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NIV)** and you tell me:

**“(1) But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. (2) People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, (4) treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – (5) having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.”**

2. Are we living in the last days? Based on that passage there can be no question that the answer is an unequivocal YES!
3. Which begs the question then...how should we live if we are living in the last days?
4. And my general approach and pastoral philosophy about eschatology can basically be summarized in two things Jesus said...
  - a) Two things that we do know...
  - b) Jesus said, “I am coming soon” and Jesus said, “Occupy until I come.”

## **II. What We DO Know**

A) Jesus said, “I am coming soon!”

1. **“(20) He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.” (Revelation 22:20-21, NIV)**
2. Now, someone is saying, “But Pastor Tim, it's been 2,000 years since the Lord gave that promise of His return. How can we live with any sense of urgency when it has been so long?”
3. Well, my first answer is simple and straightforward, because Jesus said so!

- a) Remember **Mark 13:32-33 (NIV)** that we just read a moment ago?  
“(32) **But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (33) Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”**
- b) So, if Jesus says, “Be on guard” and “stay alert” – how many know, that’s all the reason we need to do it!
4. But let me explain it another way as well. If the Lord does not appear to us in the next few years...rest assured of this, we are going to appear before Him one day very soon...and we had better be ready...for it will almost certainly be sooner than we think!
- a) **James 4:14 (NIV)** reminds us, “**Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.**”
- b) The problem is that most of us don’t really believe that – including professing Christians. We all think we’re going to live to 100! But it’s simply not true!
- c) We had 4 extended family members of our church die this week...
- One was 91...and though the family was sad to see him go, they sort of knew the end was near...
  - But in another instance, a 49-year old wife and mother died suddenly and unexpectedly, devastating her family and all those who knew her.
  - Every year we memorialize members of our church family and every year that list is somewhere between 15-20 people...ranging from the elderly to the young.
  - Including some who died from the coronavirus...even as we are told that more than 500,000 have died in the U.S. from this virus in the last year.
5. In **John 14:3 (NIV)** Jesus said something prophetic about His return and yet there’s an aspect to the promise that I think we sometimes miss.
- a) Jesus said, “**And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**”
- b) And yes, it is true that the Lord is coming back one day for all of us...

- c) But every day...in fact...every minute of every day...He comes for someone...and ready or not...their time on this earth is over and they are ushered into eternity...with or without Christ...depending on the choices they made to receive Him or reject Him while here on earth.
6. But those of us who live every day looking forward to being united with our Lord live a certain way...there is a “personal preparation” on our part for His return.
7. Again, the Apostle John writes about it in **1 John 3:2-3 (NIV)**, “**(2) Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be, has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (3) All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”**
- a) When my father was a boy in the 1930’s – they would sneak into the local movie theater to see Tarzan, played by Johnny Weissmuller.
- b) But in the strict holiness church my dad and his mom were attending at the time, he was told that if the Rapture took place while he was in a movie theater, he would be left behind! (How’s that for using prophecy to scare the “you-know-what” out of kids?)
- c) Well, you’re probably not going to miss the Rapture because you’re in a movie theater...
- d) But the point made by the Apostle John...is, that if we take the promise of the Lord’s return seriously...if we take the prophecy of the Lord’s return seriously...
- e) It will “seriously” impact the way we live our lives.
- f) And by God’s grace...grace that is promised to God’s people in the last verse of the Bible...we will endeavor to live a life that is pure...and pleasing to the Lord...and in so doing...find ourselves ready for His return...regardless of when that time comes.
8. So, with the Lord’s promise of His soon return...there is a “personal preparation” for us that is expected...and then, there is a “personal responsibility” that comes with the second thing that Jesus says about His return... (MUSICIANS COME)

B) Jesus said, “Occupy until I come...”

1. Listen to what Jesus says in the Parable of the Ten Servants, found in **Luke 19:11-13 (KJV)**, “**(11) And as they heard these things, he [Jesus] added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. (12) He said therefore, ‘A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. [Make no mistake, we’re talking about the Lord’s return here]. (13) And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, ‘Occupy till I come.’”**

a) The NKJV says, “Do business until I come!”

b) What do you suppose Jesus meant by that statement?

2. If our eschatology does not address our “personal responsibilities” in the kingdom of God...while we await the return of our king...then we have an under-developed eschatology!

3. One of the consequences of COVID-19 (and there have been good and bad things we have learned through it), but one of the consequences has been that of people going into a “survival mode” – meaning, right now I have to look out for myself and my own family.

a) And on one level, that is obviously okay and certainly understandable.

b) But as we begin to get past COVID-19 (and we are not there yet, I repeat, we are not there yet), but as we get there...one of the challenges that pastors and those in spiritual leadership will face...is to encourage and inspire the body of Christ to once again become engaged in doing the business of the kingdom!

4. The research experts tell us that long after COVID-19 is behind us, anywhere from 25-35% or more of congregations will continue to watch services online, instead of coming out to church.

a) Why? Because it is “easier,” it is “convenient”, we can stay home in our pajamas, enjoy another cup of coffee or another pancake, etc.

b) ...now if you are staying home because you have not had your vaccine yet or you have other concerns about catching the virus, we FULLY understand and support that caution and concern. COMPLETELY!

- c) ...if, however, 3 months from now, 6 months from now, 9 months from now...you are staying home because it is more comfortable and more convenient...
- d) ...then I would challenge you to go back and read that parable about the 10 servants...and see what Jesus said happened to the ones that were lazy, indifferent, or distracted from doing their Master's business!
- e) They weren't "occupying" while they awaited the Master's return:
- They weren't sharing the gospel...
  - They weren't bringing people to church...
  - They weren't using their God-given gifts in ministry service...
  - They weren't serving the poor or ministering God's grace to the grieving, the hurting, the helpless, hopeless, and homeless...
  - They forgot about the power and purpose for corporate worship, forgetting that God does something special as we gather together in His presence that is unique and different from what happens in our personal and private times of devotions...
  - I can't tell you how many have said to me, "Pastor, while I have been so grateful for the ability to watch online, now that I am back, it is clearly different, and I did not realize how much I missed the corporate worship experience."
5. You see...Jesus is very clear that once we are saved...as we wait for His return, we do not wait passively...but we wait energetically and enthusiastically as we ENGAGE ourselves in the Great Commission.
6. I take you back to the conversation between Jesus and His disciples in Acts 1:6-7 (NIV) where we read, **“(6) Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (7) He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”**
7. Jesus said, timing is not for you to know...but notice what He said we DO need to know in the very next verse, **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, NIV)**

8. THERE is your last days theology and eschatology!
  - a) We do NOT know the day or the hour of our Lord’s Return.
  - b) But we DO know that He said two things!
    - He said, “I am coming soon!”
    - And He said, “Occupy until I come!”
  - c) So many of Jesus’ parables deal with vigilance and service while we wait for the Lord’s return...
    - The Parable of the Ten Virgins (**Matthew 25:1-13**)
    - The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in **Matthew 20:1-16**, the Master was still going out and hiring workers at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour...
      - Northpoint students...you are among the 11<sup>th</sup> hour workers!
      - Best players put in the game in the last two minutes!!!
    - In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in **Matthew 13** Jesus said, **“while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat” (Matthew 13:25, KJV)**
      - GOD HELP US LOVED ONES! There is no time for sleeping!
      - The harvest is ripe, but the laborers are few! (**Matt. 9:37, NIV**)
9. Our congregation in Lynnfield hears me say this a lot...the main thing...is to keep the main thing...the main thing!
  - a) God forgive us for getting distracted by political agendas...(expound)
  - b) God forgive us for getting distracted by spending enormous amounts of time and energy debating differences in theology/eschatology...
  - c) God forgive us for putting our own personal agendas, desires, and worldly pursuits above that of advancing His kingdom and doing His kingdom business!
  - d) Time is short and we must keep the main thing the main thing.
  - e) And here is how I know the gospel is the “main thing” – it’s because when I get invited to the bedside of a dying loved one who’s eternal destination is still in doubt...
    - The family wants me to do one thing...
    - They don’t want me to talk to their dying loved one about our church or our pretty building or how many neat programs we have...

- They want me to talk to their dying loved about one thing...about the main thing...
  - About the fact that there is salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus...and that even there...in their final moments of life here on earth...
  - Like the thief on the cross beside Jesus...
  - Salvation is possible by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord!
10. Let me try to explain it this way...
- a) I am not trying to minimize the importance of studying eschatology or understanding the signs of the times in which we live...for surely the end is near...I truly believe that...
  - b) But in my 45+ years of pastoral ministry...for every question I have received...as a pastor...about eschatology and the end of times...and when is Jesus coming back...
  - c) For every one of those kinds of questions...I have received hundreds of other questions that sound more like this:
    - “Pastor, what do I do with my teenager who is addicted to drugs, pregnant out-of-wedlock, 11-year-old cutting herself?”
    - “Pastor, my marriage appears to be over, is there anything you can do to help save my marriage?”
    - “Pastor, I’ve lost my job, I’ve lost my sense of hope and purpose, I don’t even feel like life is worth living anymore...”
  - d) And for each of those people making those kinds of statements...they literally feel like the world...or at least their world...is coming to an end...they are experiencing their Armageddon...they are experiencing what feels like their Apocalypse!

## **Conclusion**

A. So, what can we do about it?

- 1) I don’t know if Jesus is coming back today...but what I do know is that...
  - a. Approximately 156 people will die in MA today...(PRE-COVID)
  - b. Approximately 7,778 people will die in the U.S. today...

- c. Approximately 151,000 people will die worldwide today (55M a year)
- d. And most of them will go out into eternity without Christ...forever lost...
- e. My eschatology tells me I need to do something about that...my eschatology tells me that WE need to do something about that...  
(THAT IS WHY NORTHPOINT BIBLE COLLEGE EXISTS!)

2) But what can we do...well, here's what Jesus said in **Matthew 24:14 (NIV)**, another great prophetic passage from the lips of Jesus, **“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and THEN [repeat] the end will come.”**

- a. How do we speed our Lord's return?
- b. By proclaiming the gospel to all the world...beginning with our next door neighbor!
- c. Some might say that the gospel “is” being preached around the world because of where we can go and what we can do via the internet.
- d. But what we also know is that approximately 3.23B are still waiting for an adequate presentation of the gospel. I would interpret that to mean that we still have a lot of work to do.

3) Yes, the Lord is coming soon!

- a. And yes, the Church says, “Amen, Lord – come quickly!”
- b. **“(8) But do not forget this one thing, dear friends:”** Peter writes, **“With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. (9) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”**  
(2 Peter 3:8-9, NIV)

4) God help us if that is not our desire too! Let's put our hand to the plow and not look back, let's take as many people to heaven with us as we can! All to the glory of God!!!

B. Closing prayer and invitation:

- 1) Those who need to “prepare” for the Lord's Return.
- 2) Those who need to accept their “personal resp.” to occupy until He comes!