

Eschatology – Discovering Doctrine

- The doctrine of last things will be our focus in this session
- The Greek word eschatos means last or farthest
- As we know, ology means the study of
- Therefore, this is the study of last things
- It most often deals with death, judgement, and the final destination of the soul

- These are the statements we'd like to examine on this doctrine from our foundations booklet...

 1. We believe in Christ's future appearing in the air to receive His saints and in the resurrection of the righteous dead.
 2. We believe that each believer will be evaluated at the Judgement Seat of Christ for reward or loss of reward.
 3. We believe in Christ's bodily return to the earth to reign from the throne of David.
 4. We believe in the Great White Throne Judgement of the unsaved.
 5. We believe in the new heaven and the new earth.
 6. We believe in a dispensational system of interpreting God's work with mankind since Creation.

- It may be helpful, before we get started to make a summary of future events
- As we make our way through these statements, the order of things may become muddled
- I wrote an "order of events" summary many years ago that looks like this...

"I believe that the church will be taken out of this world before a seven year tribulation period begins. Jesus will call us to meet Him in the air with the sound of a trumpet. A great and powerful man will soon come to world prominence and unite all nations with lies. He will exalt himself as God and be worshiped by many. Three and a half years into this seven year period much terrible judgment will come to the earth as a result of sin. When the judgment is ended, Christ will return with His saints to destroy the wicked and bind Satan. This war will be followed by a thousand years of peace with the reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. Following this peaceful reign, Satan will be loosed, and soon destroyed by fire. The dead will then stand before God at the Great White Throne Judgment, where those who are not found written in the book of life will be cast into the Lake of Fire, and those found written in the Book of Life will be blessed with the privilege of dwelling with Christ for eternity in a new Heaven and new earth."

- This is just my statement on the timeline future events
- But it will help you to understand my perspective as we begin this discussion

- First, Jesus promised to return and to take His saints to our eternal home
- This is a home which He is preparing for us
- A number of passages in the New Testament help us understand
- The first one we will read is a promise from Jesus...

John 14:1-3

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 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.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

- We don't know the time of His return
- But the manner of His return is described for us in scripture
- Starting in the book of Acts...

Acts 1:9-11

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

- Jesus, in His resurrected body, has just appeared before His disciples
- And the manner of His departure (the angels say) will be very similar to His return
- One translation puts it this way...

"You saw Jesus carried away from you into heaven. He will come back in the same way you saw him go."

- The next description fits very well with our first "we believe" statement
- Which is about His "future appearing in the air to receive His saints and in the resurrection of the righteous dead"
- This passage is explicit about it...

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- There is more about the dead in Christ rising first in other chapters
- Those of us who are alive at this time will rise to meet Him
- There will be no death for us
- Our bodies will be changed, made incorruptible
- And we will - from that moment - be with Jesus forever
- Let's take a look at a few more details...

1 Corinthians 15:52-57

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- The dead in Christ - Christians who have already died - shall be re-united with a body that is now incorruptible
- The formerly mortal body will put on immortality
- That is the body that used to decompose will be replaced with that which will never decompose
- The body, which was temporary, will be replaced with a body that is eternal
- Both dead and alive in Christ will have a new body, which is fit for eternity with Christ
- Statement two goes on to say "each believer will be evaluated at the Judgement Seat of Christ for reward or loss of reward"
- We know for sure that no believer in Christ faces condemnation
- Because of Christ's sacrifice, we have escaped all condemnation
- Romans 8 makes this clear when it says...

Romans 8:1

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

- But believers will stand before God
- The Bible calls this reckoning "the judgement seat of Christ"
- As we see in Romans...

Romans 14:10-12

10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

- We will receive reward for faithful service
- Or lack reward if we have been unfaithful
- But none of us faces the kind of judgement someone apart from Christ will face
- Ours is a measurement of reward, not a punishment for rejection of the Savior

- There is more from scripture on this topic...

1 Corinthians 3:11-14

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

- For disciples of His, the Bible speaks in terms of reward or lack of reward
- It speaks in terms of trying our works
- 2 Corinthians provides this explanation...

2 Corinthians 5:8-10

8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

- It is never the desire of a disciple to avoid this judgement seat
- When we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord
- Who is merciful, and gracious, and forgiving, and loving, and kind

- But that which we have done in the body will be evaluated
- Have we been faithful or unfaithful?
- Can what we have done be considered good or bad in serving Christ?

- This evaluation is made to determine what we receive, it says here
- We cannot receive condemnation, but we can fail to receive that which we may have received because of a lack of fidelity to Christ and His word
- There are many more details about our next "we believe" statement in 2 Peter
- It is about "Christ's bodily return to the earth to reign from the throne of David"
- Which we can read about..

2 Peter 3:4-10

4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

- Many have mocked the idea of a judgement or coming destruction
- Things appear to be going on just as they always have
- Since God's judgement of earth by flood, things have continued without much change
- But no one should be ignorant
- God is not constrained by time
- And He keeps His promises
- What's more, He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance
- With that being said, the day of the Lord will come quickly

- There will be melting, fervent heat, burning, the heavens will be dissolved
- And there will be a new heavens and a new earth
- In them, righteousness will dwell
- Jesus will reign
- As the prophecy of Him told us..

Isaiah 9:6-7

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

- And as we were also told in the gospel of Luke...

Luke 1:31-33

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

- Not only will Christ reign for a thousand years on this earth, after the tribulation, while Satan is bound
- But He will reign forever over the new heavens and the new earth
- First a description of those 1,000 years...

Revelation 20:1-3

1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

- At the end of that period...

Revelation 20:7-10

7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,
 8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.
 9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.
 10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

- At this time, "we believe" statement four comes into play
- About "the Great White Throne Judgement of the unsaved"
- Which is the next topic in the chapter we have been reading...

Revelation 20:11-15

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.
 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.
 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.
 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.
 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

- This great white throne is for all who are dead without Christ
- All who have rejected Christ
- All who have died in their sins, without a relationship with Him
- The end of every one of these - small and great - is judgement in the lake of fire
- Death and hell are cast in
- This is called the second death
- It's called this because all who died without Christ - all in hell - are cast into it
- And this is their final place of judgement
- This is the place that Jesus said in Matthew 25, was prepared for the devil and his angels

- Our final "we believe" statement establishes our perspective on all scripture, including these last things
- In that it says we have "a dispensational system of interpreting God's work with mankind since Creation"
- This will take some explanation

- First, it should be said that this is a perspective gained by study of the whole of scripture
- And recognizing when we do, that God has dealt with His people in different ways at different times
- These different ways and different times are sometimes described as dispensations
- They don't have to be
- Just recognizing and explaining them - realizing they exist - is usually enough to keep us on track

- When we have seen (even in this series) the way in which God dealt with Adam before the fall
- And how that after the fall His interaction changed and was different
- We are recognizing a dispensation

- When we make note of Genesis 12 at the calling of Abram
- And understand that God makes Him a series of promises that establish the future of Israel
- We are again recognizing a dispensation

- If you know your Bible, you may be able to fill in some I missed
- And also keep the pattern going through our age of grace and of the church
- And into the Kingdom period we have discussed tonight

- Kevin Bauder of Central Baptist Theological Seminary said in one of his writings on Dispensationalism "If you don't sacrifice bulls and goats to God, and if you feel free to eat shrimp and ham, then you believe in dispensations."
- And this is accurate, whether we choose to call any periods dispensations or not

- There are three widely-regarded keys to the dispensational mindset
- All of which we adopt
- I want to outline them for you here...

 1. The literal interpretation of scripture
 2. Recognizing Israel and the Church as distinct peoples of God
 3. The glory of God is the unifying theme of Biblical history

- We have, in every study we've undertaken so far, adopted these perspectives
- You may be adopting them yourself without even realizing it
- This is because they are driven by the text and not anything outside the Bible

- Let's talk about each of them
- First, what one commentator called the "consistently literal, or plain, interpretation of scripture"
- That is, the words of scripture should be interpreted by the intended meaning of the original author within the historic context of his writing
- This is exactly the method I have attempted to use throughout our time together in Discovering Doctrine
- In the timeline of scripture, from history, to present, to future predictions, this principle remains consistent
- Second, we would answer the question "Has the church replaced Israel?" in the negative
- Israel is a nation, descended from Abram, God's chosen people, with unique promises and covenants
- God's work in the history of the nation of Israel (including the keeping of covenants and promises) has not ended
- The church (unlike Israel) is not united by a common ancestry, language, or geography, we are united by Christ
- Third, Dispensationalists see the glory of God as bigger and more far-reaching than the plan of salvation alone
- This means, "The soteriological or saving program of God is not the only program, but one of the means God is using in the total program of glorifying Himself."
- Salvation is part of God's greater plan to glorify Himself through His son Jesus Christ
- We come to texts, like those we have discussed tonight, with these prerequisites
- Again, which we find in the text
- Not one text, but many together