

(The Last Days and the Lord's Coming) How God Will Wind Up Everything

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen discusses the significance of suffering and joy in the Christian life as we approach the last days and the return of Christ.

Duration: 59:06

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 16:19-21, John 16:33

Topics: "New Covenant", "Christian Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in Christianity. He explains that the Old Covenant Gospel focuses on material prosperity and earthly blessings, while the New Covenant Gospel emphasizes a personal relationship with God and salvation from sin. The preacher highlights that the world's joy is dependent on external circumstances, while the Christian's joy is independent of circumstances. He also mentions that Jesus endured suffering and pain but maintained inner joy, and encourages believers to focus on the joy set before them in fellowship with the Father.

Transcript

The last time we were studying what Jesus said that before a baby is born a mother goes through travail or birth pangs and it's only after that the baby is born. Jesus said that in John 16 and verse 21. He was talking about his return.

He said, in a little while, verse 19 of John 16, John 16 19, in a little while I will be gone from you and a little while again you'll see me again. That little while of course is extended 2,000 years. And then he said, one day your sorrow will be turned into joy but until then, until that day you will weep and lament, verse 20, but the world will rejoice.

Now the Bible says that Christians must rejoice in the Lord always. So how does that agree with what Jesus said, you will weep and lament but the world will rejoice. Obviously the world's joy is going to be external, superficial, which depends on circumstances and when things go right.

But the Christians joy is completely independent of circumstances. It doesn't matter what's happening in the world around because he's not rejoicing in his circumstances, he's rejoicing in the Lord. The world is

full of people who either rejoice in the Lord or rejoice in their circumstances.

And you know which category you belong to. The Lord never changes and if you rejoice in the Lord you will never be depressed at any time in your life, no matter what happens. But people in the world, they find their joy in circumstances.

So when circumstances are good, they rejoice. Circumstances are bad, they're unhappy. And if you find yourself like that in your life, you need to wake up and say, well I'm not finding my joy in the Lord at all.

You don't have to be like the rest of the world. The world rejoices externally, superficially. But the Christian, when it says you'll weep and lament, means the Christian may go through a lot of suffering.

Jesus spoke a lot about that. He said, look at me, I mean look at Jesus' own example. He had so much joy on the day before his crucifixion that he could share his joy with others.

He said, my joy I give unto you, that your joy may be full. At the same time, he was known as the man of sorrows. Externally, he went through a lot of suffering and pain, but inwardly it never took away his joy.

He is our forerunner. It says in Hebrews 12, let us run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross. He didn't enjoy the cross.

We're not asked to enjoy the cross. We endure it because there's a joy set before us, the joy of fellowship with the Father. So in this connection, he says, your one day, when you see me again, your sorrow will be turned into permanent joy.

There'll be no more suffering. And he says, a woman is in travail. When she's in travel, she has sorrow.

The period of difficulty, verse 21, because the hour has come. But when she gives birth, she completely forgets about her pain because the joy of a baby being born. And Jesus also said that.

He said that twice. Once there and the other is in Matthew 24. We saw that too, where when he spoke about wars and rumors of wars.

In Matthew 24, verse 9, they'll deliver you to tribulation and kill you and all. He called it all, verse 8, the beginning of birth pangs. That means it's about time for the baby to be born.

A picture of it is about time for Christ to come. Now why is it that in the Old Testament, if you look at the Old Testament, as far as I know, the word tribulation never comes in the Old Testament. And even persecution, they persecuted me, is found only mostly in the Psalms.

You know, these people are persecuting me, etc. A lot of Psalms are like that. But otherwise, persecution and tribulation are hardly ever found in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the words are prosperity, and you will rule over the nations, and I'll give you this land from here to here, and your enemies, your earthly enemies will be defeated. So in the New Testament, however, Jesus said in the world you'll have tribulation, John 16, 33. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Now if you don't understand this significant difference between the Old Covenant and New Covenant, what will happen is, you will open your heart to an Old Covenant message. And if you look at Christendom

today, I can say, broadly speaking, there are two types of preachers. There are preachers who are preaching Old Covenant Gospel, and there are preachers who are preaching a New Covenant Gospel.

The Old Covenant preacher says, God will give you houses and lands, and He'll make you very rich. But they won't tell you one word about, God will give you victory over your anger, and your lusting with your eyes, and your love of money, and your anxiety, and no, they won't speak a word about all that. The New Covenant preacher does not tell you about prosperity and health.

The New Covenant preacher says, in the kingdom, if you seek the kingdom of God, God will give you enough for your earthly needs. Enough health, and enough wealth. He's not going to make you rich, but He'll give you enough.

You won't starve. He won't leave you out in the streets. But that's not the primary thing.

The New Covenant life is one where we know God personally, and we are saved from our sins, because Jesus came for that. So, you know, naturally, worldly believers would rather listen to an Old Covenant Gospel. Why has God allowed both these Gospels to be preached in the world today? You know why? Because He's testing all believers to see which one will they respond to.

Where are their hearts set? Jesus said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So, when these two Gospels go forth, one preaching earthly prosperity, and physical health, and a lot of earthly blessings, another gospel preaching overcoming sin, and pleasing God, and denying yourself, and following Jesus. As you hear these two messages, without your knowing it, God tests you to see where your heart is.

That's what God wants to find out. Is your heart on earth, or is your heart in heaven? Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. I think we're being tested.

Many of you watch Christian television, you're tested all the time. And you come here and hear this message too, and many people try to mix the two. I hope you can do it.

Jesus never did it. That is why I say, read the Gospels and see what Jesus taught, and be clear about the gospel that Jesus preached. And like I said in the last time, if you don't read the Gospels, you don't read the New Testament, you deserve to be deceived.

Because you despise God's Word, and choose the Word of men. Anyone who chooses the Word of men, above the Word of God, deserves to be deceived thoroughly. Because the Bible says in 2nd Thessalonians, in chapter 2. See, this is, we must, whenever you read a verse, you must see it in its context.

Okay? Like when you read a letter, you don't just read one sentence in the middle of page 3 or page 5. You read the whole paragraph. So what is 2nd Thessalonians 2 talking about? We request you brethren, verse 1, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him. That's the subject.

The coming of Christ, and our being taken up to be with Him. Raptured. We're going to be raptured.

We're going to be taken up to be with Him. And he said something about that in the previous chapter. We'll come to that.

But he said, when, don't be shaken from your composure, or disturbed by someone claiming to speak in the spirit, or claiming that a message has come, or a letter from the Apostle Paul. You know those days, somebody could send a fake letter and say, Paul wrote this. So don't be disturbed by that, telling you that the day of the Lord has already come.

That means, but somebody, some believer says, what do you mean the day of the Lord has already come? Didn't Jesus say that as the lightning shines from the east to the west, so will it be when the Son of Man comes? Ah, but somebody will say, no he came secretly. He came secretly and took some people. Don't be disturbed by all this teaching.

Let no one deceive you. For that day will not come, until first there's a great falling away, apostasy. That day will not come, until the man of sin, the Antichrist is revealed.

I mean, I can't think that anything could be plainer than that in Scripture. The Son of Destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above everything, and he'll sit in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. The New Testament teaches that some person will arise, who's going to be a sort of a world ruler, and Christ will not come, till that man arises.

So though it's a very nice thing to believe that Jesus may come tonight, or Jesus may come tomorrow morning, to tell you frankly, I don't believe it, because I believe Scripture. There are many areas in our mind, where we, in our life, where we have to change our way of thinking, because from childhood, we were taught certain things. For example, in baptism.

I was baptized as a little baby. One day I grew up, and I'm 21 years old. I discovered as I studied the Bible, that's not according to Scripture.

So I changed my view. I changed my view on many things, because I decided that Scripture is God's word, and the rest is a teaching of men. In fact, even when Jesus was on earth, this was his problem.

A lot of people believed the traditions of men, and his greatest battle was with people who believed the traditions of men, and were completely unwilling to change it. And then he says in verse 5, don't you remember that when I was with you, I was telling you all these things. So why are you fellows disturbed by all this type of teaching? But you know what restrains him? So that in his time, he will be revealed.

That means the Holy Spirit was restraining the force of the Antichrist, to allow the Antichrist to come forth, because it's a particular time God is destined. Meanwhile, the mystery of sin, lawlessness is already at work. And I think the mystery of lawlessness, what is the mystery of sin? I don't know what it is, but I can make a guess.

My guess is the mystery of lawlessness is the message that tells believers, it doesn't matter if you sin. It doesn't matter. Because remember, you accepted Christ a few years ago, so it doesn't matter if you sin.

Where in the Bible do you find the Holy Spirit saying, it doesn't matter if you sin, you're okay. I know who said that, the devil, told Eve. Yeah, it doesn't matter, if you just disobey God here.

But do you know the number of believers, who've been given some brainwashing in their head saying, once you're saved, you're always saved, now it doesn't matter if you sin. The number of people who've been deceived by that teaching into living in sin, it's a mystery of lawlessness. Mystery means, you know, it's like, how in the world could a holy God tell people, it doesn't matter if you sin.

Why in the world did he give us commandments? But it's very easy for believers to be deceived. But then that lawless one will arise, this Antichrist, whom the Lord will slay with the breath of his mouth at his appearance. And this person, his coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with power, signs, and wonders, false wonders.

Now do you know that Satan, when he wants to manifest himself, he's going to manifest himself with signs, and miracles, and false wonders. The number of times that comes in Scripture. Now many people don't think that, because many people, if they see a miracle done in the name of Jesus, say, oh, that's a man of God.

I don't say that so soon. I want to see his life, because Jesus said, you will not know them by their gifts, you'll know them by their fruit. So I look for fruit.

I want to see if this preacher is free from the love of money. I want to see if this preacher has got humility. And if it's a woman preacher, I want to see if she's got a meek and a quiet spirit.

I don't care for doctrine alone, because the wolf will come with the sheep's clothing. Sheep's clothing means correct doctrine. But I don't want to be fooled by that.

The wolf is interested in the sheep's money. Uh-huh. Then I'm not going to be fooled by the sheep's clothing.

I hope you won't be fooled. Then he goes on to say, he's not only going to come with power and you know, this is the last days. Remember, he's talking about the coming of the Lord.

And this, see, we know that the Antichrist is finally going to come. But let me just turn you to a verse before I come back to 2 Thessalonians 2. And that's in 1 John chapter 2. John says, Children, verse 18, 1 John 2, 18. It is the last hour in 95 AD, when John wrote his first letter.

The clock was already 11 p.m. It was 11 p.m. in 95 AD. Where do you think we are today? 1159 plus, I don't know how many seconds. But anyway, in those days, it was the last hour.

And as you have heard, 1 John 2, 18, that the Antichrist is coming, the Antichrist, that's his one world ruler, is coming. Even now, many little, little Antichrists have arisen, preparing the way. So if there were little Antichrists that arose at 11 p.m., can you imagine how many more little Antichrists there will be by 1159, when we are living now? And where are these little, little Antichrists? That's important.

We've got to locate them. Where are they? Verse 19, they were in our midst, in the church, and they went out from our midst. If they were really belong to us, then they would have been with us.

But when they went out, who? These little, little Antichrists. It was so that it might be shown that they don't belong to us. Why did they leave a church where John was preaching? Why would you leave a church where the Apostle John is preaching? You would think that no Christian would leave a church where the Apostle John was preaching.

Today, everybody respects the Apostles. But remember, when the Apostles were on earth, they were treated like scum. Today, all Christians speak, Oh, Paul, Peter, John.

It's very easy to respect a man of God after he's dead and gone. The history of 2,000 years of Christianity teaches one thing, that a man of God and an Apostle is usually not respected or recognized in his lifetime.

After he's dead and gone, then his value will be recognized.

Do you know how they treated John Wesley in England? They treated him like scum. Today, they revere him. You know how they treated William Booth and all these great men of God in their lifetime? Like scum.

But today, people respect him. It's like that. So when John was on earth, he didn't have the respect we give him today.

Why would they not stay in a church where John was preaching? Let's ask ourselves, what was John preaching in his church? You want to know? Just read 1 John. You read 1 John, that is what he was preaching in his church. And they got offended and left.

So in other words, you preach the subjects mentioned in 1 John, people get offended and go. Why? Because John doesn't say a word about speaking in tongues. John has been speaking in tongues for 65 years from the day of Pentecost.

He's not against it. But he doesn't preach on that. That's not his main theme.

He doesn't preach about healing. I'm sure God healed him in many ways to live up to the age of 95 in those difficult days. God took care of him, but that was not his subject.

He didn't preach one word about prosperity. Even though some people try to quote 3 John verse 2 and say, yes, he did. It's easy to misquote a verse where John said to somebody, I hope everything's going well with you.

I hope you're prospering like your soul is. They take that one verse because it's about the only verse they can find in the New Testament to try and preach that God wants you to be materially prosperous. It's amazing how, and I believe God has put that verse just to lead people astray who don't love the truth.

It's true. If all your doctrine is based on half verse and not the other thousands of verses in the New Testament, you deserve to be deceived. And a lot of people are.

So John says, they went out from among us because they didn't like the message John preached, walk in the light. My little children chapter 2 verse 1, I'm writing these things to you that you don't sin. That's what they didn't like.

Love your brothers. If you don't love your brother, 1 John 4, you're a liar. You're not a believer.

You know, Jesus called John a son of thunder. You remember in the gospels, he was an apostle of love, but it was fervent love for God. And all the other things he mentioned their obedience to his commandments.

People didn't like that. They went out from among us. Antichrist means against Christ, which means against the message that Christ preached.

Christ came to save people from their sins. If you're not interested in that, there's a little bit of the spirit of the antichrist in you. And you will not stay in a church that preaches against sin.

You will go to a church that teaches you how to be rich in the world, even if you're defeated by sin. Come back to 2 Thessalonians 2. So you see, we are going to have, as we approach the end of time, many of

these little little antichrists. Now we think of antichrist as some horrible evil man.

Anti means against. That's all it means. Against Christ.

Now I'll give you one example. Do you know the number of times where Jesus lifted up people who were paralyzed and lying down on the opposite of that? Pushing them down. What would you call that? Against Christ.

I never see Jesus pushing anybody down. But do you know the number of believers who sit with mouth open and say, this is the manifestation of God. I'd say it's the manifestation of God as the man overcomes his anger at the end of it and overcomes his lusting with his eyes and overcomes the love of money and overcomes bitterness and jealousy and loves his enemies and speaks the truth always.

Then I would say it's the manifestation of God. Otherwise, if he gets up and lives in the same old sinful life, it's the greatest deception of the devil. It is to do the opposite of what Jesus did.

I want to do what Jesus did, not the opposite of what Jesus did. I don't find Jesus condemning sinners. He condemns hypocrites and Pharisees.

He was ruthless against people who made money in the name of religion in the temple. When you are not ruthless against people who make money in the name of Christ in the church, you are anti-Christ. Christ never made money through preaching.

So if we do the opposite of Christ, that means you make money through preaching and not bring people to a godly life. That's the opposite of Christ. Jesus came to save people from their sins.

So the spirit of anti-Christ is rampant in Christendom today and hardly anybody preaches about it. There are powers in the second Thessalonians too. There are powers and signs and false wonders.

You say, why does God allow all this? Why did God allow Satan to get into the garden of Eden first of all? Let's ask that question. What is the answer? Couldn't God have stopped him? When Satan was coming into the serpent in the garden of Eden, you think God was asleep? You think God didn't know what was happening? And while Satan was talking to Eve, you think God did not know what was happening there? Why didn't he suddenly send an angel there immediately when he saw Eve about to reach out her hand to take the fruit? Why didn't God send an angel? He knew what was happening. You know why he allowed Satan to enter the garden of Eden? Because he was testing man.

I have given them my word. God says, I've given Adam and Eve my word. It's clear.

They're not stupid people. They understand what I said. Now let me see whether they will keep my word.

In exactly the same way today, God says, I have given all these Christians the word in their own language. Let's see whether they read it. Let's see whether they keep it.

Or let's see whether they'll be deceived by the powers and signs and false wonders that they see around them. And if they don't care for God's word, even though those warnings are there, then God says they deserve to be deceived. Because they don't love the truth.

That's what's happening today. The Antichrist comes with not only powers and signs and wonders, but with deception. Verse 10.

But whom does he deceive? Those, verse 10, there's a particular category of people who are deceived by the spirit of the Antichrist, even in the world today. Those who do not receive the love of the truth, so as to be saved. Those who do not receive the love of the truth, so as to be saved.

If you can honestly say, I am completely open to God's truth. I love the truth, because I want to be saved from my sin. I guarantee you, you'll never be deceived.

But if you don't love the truth, what do I mean by the truth? First of all, the truth about yourself. In some particular situation, if the your conscience, the Holy Spirit tells you through your conscience, there you were selfish. Maybe something the way you behave towards your wife, or some neighbor, or anybody.

You were just downright selfish. That's not the way. Or the way you rudely spoke to a beggar, or somebody else.

And this Holy Spirit says, Jesus wouldn't have spoken like that. And you don't accept it. Or when you're sitting at home, gossiping, gossiping, gossiping about somebody.

And the Holy Spirit says, would you be talking like that, if Jesus was sitting in this room? No. But you won't accept it. You don't love the truth about yourself.

You don't repent. You don't confess it. You don't say, Lord, I'm sorry.

I did that. I slipped up there. These are the people who don't love the truth.

The second thing is, truth is in scripture. First, the truth about ourselves. And the Holy Spirit shows us some selfishness, or some pride.

You know, when somebody praises you, and you get a little puffed up, and the Holy Spirit says, what are you proud about? Who gave you that ability, which these people are appreciating? Wasn't it God? Do you give God the credit for it? Or do you take the credit for, you're a smart guy? You know, how many people rob God of the credit, which is due to Him? If somebody made a cake, and I went around distributing it, and I gave you the impression, when you appreciated the cake, that I made it. Wouldn't I be a liar? Wouldn't I be a liar, if I took the credit, the cake was made by somebody else? And when God gives you an ability, which you use, and somebody praises you, that's okay. But you don't give the glory to God, at least secretly.

The Holy Spirit says, you're a sinner. Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. That's how Jesus taught us to end our prayer.

So, little, little things like this, particularly selfishness and pride. And the Lord shows you, the Lord says, there you just love money. That is the clear proof that you still love money.

And you don't face up to that truth, then you don't love the truth about yourself. And the second thing is, truth in scriptures. For example, you have held a certain doctrine for 25 years.

And then as you read scripture, study scripture, you hear scripture, you hear it taught clearly verse by verse. And you say, hey, I believe something else 25 years. But I'm too proud to admit that I was wrong for 25 years.

And I manipulate the verse and try and twist it and squeeze it to fit into this mold, which I already have got. This is the right doctrine. Those are the people who don't love the truth about themselves or when they see some truth in scripture.

I decided when I was converted more than nearly 49 years ago, that if I ever saw truth in scripture on any subject, which is contrary to what I'd always believed, I would accept it. So remember, this is all referring to the last days. And for these people who don't love the truth, what is the punishment God gives them? Or what is the what they suffer as a consequence? What do they reap? Here it is.

For this reason, verse 11, God will send upon them a deceiving influence. God himself is going to deceive. Now I'll tell you the things the Bible says deceive us.

Jeremiah 17 says, the heart is deceitful above all things. In the parable of the sower in Mark chapter 4, Jesus spoke about the deceitfulness of riches. Money deceives a lot of people.

And we saw a number of verses about deceiving evil spirits. The devil is a deceiver. So here are the forces that are trying to deceive us.

First of all, our own heart. The heart is deceitful above all things. Money, which you're handling all the time, is deceiving us.

The devil is deceiving us. On top of all this, if God also deceives us, brother, there's no hope for you. Our only hope is if God at least is on our side and says, I won't deceive you.

I'll protect you from all this deception. But here it says, God himself will send a deceiving influence on people in the last days. Those days we're living in.

On whom? Not on every believer. Those who don't receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And you know the times in your life when the Holy Spirit has spoken to you about sin in your life and you justify yourself, blame your wife or blame somebody else.

That's the time when you're in danger of being deceived by God. Not because you're a great sinner. That doesn't matter.

God can protect sinners, but those who don't accept the truth about themselves. Or you read something in scripture, you hear a teaching about scripture, and you are so unwilling to give up what you have believed for so many years. You don't receive the love of the truth.

Then you are in danger of God himself allowing you to be deceived. And not only that, listen to this. God will allow such people to believe what is false.

Verse 11. Imagine God allowing you to believe what is false. Boy, I don't want to be there.

That means God will allow some people to believe that they are saved, born again, when they're not born again. Do you know the number of people I have met who I don't believe they are born again at all? But they think they are. God allows them to believe that, to believe what is false.

Do you know the thousands of people I have met in my life who believe they are filled with the Holy Spirit when all they did was speak in tongues? They're not filled with the Holy Spirit. They're not holy. But God allows them to believe what is false.

Isn't it a terrific danger to believe that I'm born again when I'm not born again? To believe that I'm filled with the Holy Spirit when I'm not filled with the Holy Spirit just because I babble something in tongues? Why does God do it? He only does it to those who don't receive the love of the truth to be saved from sin. I remember years ago when I was saying, Lord, how can I protect myself, young man, that I am from the deception of Christendom? The Lord said, love the truth about yourself to be saved from sin, to be saved from everything of Adam that is still left in you. I say, God, I want it.

My dad, I want it. I want to be saved from everything of Adam that's left in me. Everything un-Christlike.

And the Lord says, you'll never be deceived then. Never. I thank God with all my heart for light God has given me on his word.

Light God has given me on myself. In fact, if you ask me today, Brother Zach, what is the mark of God's blessing in your life? I'll tell you. He gives me light on myself in the areas where I'm un-Christlike.

That is the mark of God's blessing on my life. And then he works in me in that area to make me Christlike. I won't say prosperity.

I won't say houses or lands, not even health, even though God's given me very good health all these nearly 69 years. That's just the bonus. It's not the salary.

It's not the mark of God's blessing. The mark of God's blessing is he shows me where I'm un-Christlike day by day. And I can repent of it.

The Holy Spirit makes me like Christ. So if you don't look at it like that, God will allow you to be deluded. God himself will allow you to believe what is false so that one day, verse 12, they might all be judged.

So we don't want to be in that category. So remember that you will never be deceived concerning anything in the last days if you just love the truth so as to be saved from sin. And that's why we preach on being saved from sin from this pulpit.

I preach on it every single time I get up. Because that is the main thing why Jesus came. And also because that's hardly ever preached anywhere else.

Now why is it that God has allowed, just like I told you, God has allowed a lot of deception. Why is it he allows so much persecution? The devil comes as a serpent deceiving. He comes as a lion persecuting.

Why did he allow the early apostles to be killed, to be beheaded, to be crucified? They were so faithful. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet every one of them except John was killed.

Some of them were killed when they were very young, like James. He was about 30 years old or 32 or something and he got killed for preaching the gospel. Why has God allowed all his apostles to suffer so much? Even John.

I mean tradition tells us they tried to put him into a cauldron of boiling oil. Somehow he escaped. I don't know how.

They really suffered. Wasn't God in my heaven able to protect them? In the old testament how many cases he protected his people? But the reason for persecution is tribulation. Why does God allow tribulation to come into the life of a believer? I want you to see a verse in Romans chapter 5. Romans

chapter 5. It says we are justified by faith.

Verse 1. And now we have peace with God and we stand with him. We have obtained our introduction by faith. Verse 2. Into this grace in which we stand and we exult.

Exult is more than rejoice. We sort of get excited and rejoice in hope of the glory of God that's going to be ours. But meanwhile not only that we exult in tribulations.

How many of you know how to exult in hope of the glory of God? I think all of us. Okay that means you're past the kindergarten. Let's go to the next class.

How many of you know how to exult in tribulations? Are you failing in that subject all the time? You know people who fail in mathematics in first standard again and again and again and again and again. Well your heavenly father wants you to pass. It's the same scripture which says we exult in hope of the glory of God and we exult in tribulations.

Why? Not because of the tribulation itself but because tribulation brings perseverance and perseverance produces proven character. A lot of us have got character but it's not proven character. You know when you see a newly married couple who love one another on their wedding day that's great but it's not proven love.

I want to see them 40 years later. That's proven love because they've been through many many ups and downs. You know the difference between love and proven love? Character and proven character? Character you know you brought up in a good God-fearing way and as a little boy you're a nice boy and you're a nice 18 year old chap because you brought up in a God-fearing family but then you go out into the world and by the time you're 40-45 if you're still the same you got proven character.

What you had first was character. Now you have proven character because you've gone through so many situations and you held true to the truth. Tribulation produces proven character and that's God's aim.

James says turn to James chapter 1 verse 2 consider it all joy my brothers or some translation says consider it only joy when you encounter various trials or when you go through tribulation. That is God's method of producing character in us. Testing, trial, opposition, persecution but he says again he says the reason knowing that the testing of your faith you know in tribulation and trial your faith is tested.

Do you really believe all that the bible says? Do you really believe all that you heard in the church on Sunday morning? Now it is Tuesday afternoon and you're facing a trial in your office or in your factory or shop or hospital or college or some situation or in a bus or on the road. Your faith is tested. Faith is not tested when we are sitting listening nodding our heads here on Sunday morning.

Oh no it's tested out there in our difficult situations. The testing of your faith produces endurance and let endurance have a perfect result. The end result will be you will be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.

You'll be totally like Christ but it is through trial. It's through tribulation. That's the way all the apostles went.

Turn to 2nd Corinthians chapter 1. Paul says God comforts us. Verse 4 he comforts us in all our afflictions and one reason is so that we can comfort other people when they are in affliction with the same comfort we receive from God. Do you know that in the new testament ministry comes through trial and tribulation? Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and he went into 40 days of temptation and three and a half years

of trial and that's how a ministry came forth from him.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not enough to produce an anointed ministry. Along with the baptism in the Holy Spirit you need to go through many many trials and any man of God that's worth his salt that's ever been in Christendom in 2,000 years you can be pretty sure they've gone through many trials. They won't tell you all about it.

Jesus didn't tell us what all he went through in 30 years. You've got to guess. But there's never a man in the history of the church who's had an anointed ministry who has not gone through some type of trials in secret.

Some of it you may know most of it you won't know. He says because in those afflictions Paul says we got some strength from God and that's the strength we give to other people in our ministry and just like verse 5 the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance. So also our comfort or strengthening is abundant.

The reason why many many Christians never become strong and never have a powerful anointed ministry is they've been unfaithful in temptation. They sit like holy people in the meeting but out there in the time of trial they compromise because they love money or they seek their own or there's something they're interested in for their own gain and they compromise and then they come next Sunday and sit like holy people in the church again. If 50 years will go by they'll be just the same sitting in the kindergarten forever because they were not faithful in private.

I want to tell you as a comfort the Bible says this wonderful verse in 1 Corinthians 10 13 that God will never allow you to be tested beyond your ability. When we think of difficulty, suffering, persecution, tribulation, I have one comfort. If it were not for that I would be scared.

I'm like you. Maybe you're bolder than me. I'm humanly speaking a coward.

That's why I cling close to my heavenly father and if I cling close to my heavenly father I'm perfectly safe. The fellow who thinks I'm very bold, I can handle everything, he doesn't get close to the father. He's the fellow who's going to fall.

Are you a coward by yourself? Acknowledge it. Say Lord I'm going to cling to you. I'm going to cling to you.

I'm not strong. I'm weak. That's why I need you.

It's like the branch saying I can't produce any fruit. I have to depend on the tree all the time. That's Christianity.

Christianity is not the branch moving out and saying I can do all myself. No, I can't do anything. Without me you can do nothing.

My comfort and confidence is this. The 1 Corinthians 10 13 that tomorrow, next year, 20 years from now, 30 years from now, God will never never never allow me to face one trial for a single day which is too much for me. He will regulate it.

He is the one who controlled how much Satan could trouble Joe. He controlled it. He decided when Paul should die.

He decided when James should die. He decides when I'm going to die because I want to do his will and if you want to do his will alone, Jesus will determine when you die, nobody else. But if you don't want to do his will alone, you got your own private plans, then I don't know when you'll die.

You may die many years before his time or with all these electronic gadgets, medical gadgets, live longer than God wants you to live on the earth. I don't want either. If you're determined to do God's will alone and you have no other ambition in life except to do the will of God, I can give you a written guarantee.

You'll never die one day before God's time. No cancer, no road accident, nothing. What a wonderful way to live.

Why not live doing the will of God? He who does the will of God remains forever, the Bible says. The world is passing away but he who does the will of God will abide forever, 1 John 2. So let me turn now to Revelation. In the book of Revelation, we read about Satan being cast down to the earth three and a half years before the second coming of Christ.

That is the period when the antichrist is going to rule the earth. Now I said the other day in another study that if a person wants to live a holy life because he's scared that Jesus may come tomorrow, that's not the best way to be holy. In fact, you're unfaithful, you're a harlot.

If you're engaged to a man who's in another country and you keep fooling around with somebody else here because you know he won't come for another six months, what are you? You don't deserve to be engaged to that righteous man. Your attachment to that man is not because he may come tomorrow, I don't want him to catch me with somebody else. Is that the only reason? Then you're a harlot.

So a lot of people are trying to scare people saying Christ will come, so be careful, don't sin. I say that's not the reason for not sinning. It's a harlot who avoids sin because you think Christ will come any moment.

A virgin, he doesn't, supposing the Lord says I'm going to wait another 50 years before I come, she'll be faithful to him for 50 years. It's not the fear that he may catch me suddenly that makes me holy. What about you? Is there any part of your holiness? Is there something you do say oh Christ may come so I don't want to do it? No.

Supposing he's not coming for another 50 years, would you do it? I still want to do it. I don't want to do it. If it displeases my beloved bridegroom, there also God is sifting people.

So we read here about a time when there's a war in heaven, Revelation 12 verse 7, and the dragon and his angels were not strong enough and no place was found for them. Verse 8 in heaven, Revelation 12 8, and the devil was thrown down to the earth. Verse 9. I want you to see the stages of Satan's fall.

Many years ago we read in Isaiah 14, he was thrown out of God's presence, the third heaven. He didn't go to hell. Do you know that Satan has never been in hell till today? And do you know even something more amazing, Satan will never be in hell.

These are all people who haven't read the scriptures, who believe all this rubbish. What do you know about Satan except what's in the Bible? Nowhere in the Bible does it say that Satan is in hell. Nowhere does it say he will be in hell.

Where did you get these ideas? Just another one of those traditions of men. Isaiah 14 says he was thrown out of the third heaven and he came to the second heavens. The first heaven is what we see, the space.

Between space and God's third heaven, we read about a third heaven in 2nd Corinthians 12, is the second heaven or what Ephesians 6.12 calls the heavenlies. And when you're filled with the spirit, you become aware of spirit beings in the heavenly realm with whom you battle. If you're not filled with the spirit, you'll be ignorant of it.

But there is a battle in the heavenlies, in the second heaven. One day, three and a half years before Christ's coming, Satan is going to be thrown down from the second heaven to the earth and he won't be able to go even to the second heaven after that. Now he can wander around the earth like in Job's time, but he's not here permanently.

He's going to be thrown down to this earth for three and a half years and he's going to persecute the saints like anything through the Antichrist. I believe he's going to personally indwell the Antichrist. Many people are possessed by demons, but Satan himself indwells certain special people.

There may have been one or two in the history of humanity whom he personally indwelled. He didn't give that job to a junior demon. One was Judas Iscariot.

You read in John 13, Satan came into him. He will also be in the Antichrist and he may have been in one or two big figures in history who persecuted some of God's people. But he will be in the Antichrist and at the end of three and a half years, Christ will return and we'll be on earth.

We'll be true to Jesus. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability. The Antichrist will be here.

We refuse to receive his mark. We'll be true and faithful to him, to Jesus and the Lord will test us. And isn't it wonderful? I think it's a tremendous honor in the hour of Christ's last battle that he's got some faithful soldiers who don't want to run away but who want to fight for the Lord and stand for him.

Do you want to be there? Do you want to be one of those soldiers who say, I'm scared? I'm scared too, but he'll give me grace. He'll give me grace. Otherwise none of us can stand.

But I think it'll be a tremendous honor to be martyred. Boy, isn't that the best way to die? Do you want to die of cancer, road accidents or to be martyred for Christ? I can't imagine a better way to go. And that'll happen.

A lot of saints are going to be killed. But it's going to be the preparation for the birth pangs. And then Christ will come.

As he comes, it says, let's see how he comes. 1 Thessalonians 4. The Lord will descend, verse 16, with a shout from heaven, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we will always be with the Lord. So this is how it's going to be.

There'll be a trumpet, the archangel, angels, Jesus coming in the clouds. The dead raised up from the cemeteries around the world. Those are buried in the sea, wherever they are.

And we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air to welcome him down to the earth. It's like a father who's been away for a long time. The children run out of the gate to welcome dad.

We're so glad to see you again. Come home. It's a welcoming committee going up to bring Jesus down to the earth.

I think the whole process will probably take, maybe we'll go to meet him in the air and we'll be gathered there and probably within 24 hours we'll be down on this earth. Jesus said in relation to that, don't you believe all these people who say he's coming secretly, he's coming here, he's coming there. He said in Matthew 24, don't believe those who say, verse 23, he's here, he's there.

Don't believe them because verse 27, Matthew 24, as the lightning flashes, so will the coming of the son of man be. And that will be verse 29, after the tribulation, after the tribulation, the sign of the son of man will appear in the sky, verse 30. And every eye will see him.

He will come in the clouds. The same thing we read in 1 Thessalonians 4, the angels, the trumpet and the elect will be gathered to meet him in the air. That's how it's going to be.

And he's going to destroy the antichrist. It's going to be a great battle called the battle of Armageddon in the plains of Israel. We read in Ezekiel chapter 38, that Russia and other nations will come against Israel.

And that in that last day, the Lord will come down and smite his enemies. You read about it in Revelation 19, how he comes with the saints, you know, they've been raptured up, we come down with him. And then we read, he's going to set his foot upon the Mount of Olives.

We saw that the other day. And establish his kingdom in Jerusalem and bring peace on the earth for 1,000 years. And during those 1,000 years, we read in Revelation 20, Satan, verse 2, Revelation 22, Satan will be bound in a bottomless pit.

Now he's not bound. You know, there are a lot of people who say, Satan, I bind you. You can't bind Satan.

We can never say that to him. We can bind his activities. But you can't bind Satan.

You can't bind a demon. There are Christians who don't read the Bible who try to bind Satan. You know, the number of thousands of Christians whom I've heard say, Satan, I bind you.

Well, how is he looser than tomorrow, if you bound him? Only Jesus is going to bind him one day. Satan will be bound. So don't try to do it.

You can bind his activities on earth, but you can't bind him. Because that's going to happen when Christ comes again. The number of unscriptural practices and words of Christians who don't read the Bible, it's amazing.

He's going to be bound because they picked it up from somewhere. They heard in some Pentecostal church, some pastor said, ah, good thing to say. Sounds very impressive.

No, Satan, I bind you. Nothing happens. He's going to be bound one day for a thousand years.

And then after the thousand years are over, he'll be released. Chapter 20, verse 7, Revelation. And he will come out and for maybe another 24 hours or short period, he's going to deceive people again.

And the Lord will come down and judge him. And then he will be cast, verse 10, not into hell, into the lake of fire. And hell is like a small pond of fire.

The pond of fire will be thrown into the lake of fire. That's why I said Satan never goes to hell. He goes to the lake of fire.

From third heaven to second heaven, to the earth, to the bottomless pit, to the lake of fire. That's Satan's journey. And then after the thousand years are over, God's going to set up his throne, verse 11, where all the people that ever lived from the time of Adam, those whose names are not in the book of life, they will all be there.

And they'll be judged according to their works to show everybody. There'll be a videotape of all their entire life, thought, word, deed, everything will be shown to prove to people these people deserve to go to hell. And then will be established a new heavens and a new earth in chapter 21.

The important thing is to be ready, even if we don't understand everything. It's a wonderful hope we have. It'll be worth it all when we see Jesus.

Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ. That's how it's going to be, brothers and sisters. And we look forward to his coming.

We, I want to show you one last verse, 1 John chapter 3, verse 2. We are already children of God, but we don't know what it's going to be like when he appears. We know one thing. We'll have a body just like his, which cannot be hindered by walls, which cannot be hindered by distance, which can move from earth to heaven in a fraction of a second.

We're going to have a body just like his, which is not going to be pulled down by gravity. But more than all those physical things, we shall be like him. Our nature will be totally Christ-like.

And if you have this hope, verse 3, you will purify yourself until you reach his standard of purity. I want to be in a church that encourages me to purify myself every day until I become like Christ. That is the person who's ready for Christ's coming.

Are you purifying yourself? Are you cleansing yourself from the type of television programs you watch and that you encourage your children to watch? Are you destroying your children? You know, just give them a few drops of poison every day. Be wise. Give them a hunger and a thirst for God.

We're approaching difficult times. Are you careful about the type of books you read and things like that? May God help us. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, help us to be ready for your coming. We don't know when it'll be. We know it's near.

We want to be faithful. We want to be prepared for the birth pains that will come upon this earth. We look forward to seeing you face to face.

Help us to purify ourselves in the meanwhile, to encourage one another, to build one another up. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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