

## **Why Every Calvinist Should Be a Premillennialist, Part 1**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Now I've been telling you for a number of months that we were going to get in to the subject of eschatology, the doctrine of last things. We've been working our way through doctrinal emphases in Scripture, doctrinal themes. And we have covered a lot of ground, but we now come to the doctrines that relate to the end times. And in line with that, I want to try at least in the next couple of Sunday nights to establish a foundation for our understanding.

Now talking about eschatology is not without controversy. There are a number of viewpoints of what the Bible means when it speaks of future events. We understand that when you have a prophecy in the Bible that has not yet come to pass, not everything will be clear. In 1 Peter chapter 1 you remember Peter says that the prophets who wrote concerning Christ, concerning the things to come wondered what person and what time. That is to say that while they understood that someone would come, they understood whatever it was that had been revealed to them, the timing was not clear and the precise personages were not clear. We can take prophetic Scripture at face value. We can interpret it the way we interpret any other passage of Scripture with the same use of the normal, natural means of interpreting language. And we should. And it will yield for us as clear an understanding of the future as the Lord wants us to have. It's not nearly as difficult as some people make it if you just take Scripture at face value.

Now to affix our thinking to one great future event which seems to be the most controversial, I want you to think with me about the coming Kingdom of Christ, known as the Millennial Kingdom because in the twentieth chapter of Revelation, the opening of that chapter, there is reference to the reign and rule of Jesus Christ on the earth which lasts one thousand years. In fact, one thousand is repeated six times in that brief text. That leaves me with the impression that God wants us not to question the length of its duration.

Now with regard to the coming Kingdom of Christ in which Christ rules as supreme and sovereign ruler, there are a number of views. But let me boil them down to three views, and these are good and I'll give you a simple explanation so that you understand where we are going. The first view we'll call the post-millennial view. That is to say that Christ will come after the Millennium, that the return of Christ is post, it is after the Millennial Kingdom. Christ will return, He will come in a glorious Second Coming to earth but not to establish His Kingdom, but rather His Kingdom has been established. Who will establish it? The church. The church will have an increasing influence in the world. The church will become more influential, more impactful, more spiritually powerful. The church will move out of its own environs to capture nations, leaders, ideologies, philosophies, theories, religions, and bring them all into captivity to Christ. In the world things will get better and better and better as the church becomes more powerful and more influential. And when the church has brought about the dominating influence of Christ across the world, He will then come and end everything and establish the new heaven and the new earth which is the eternal state. Post-millennialists think things are going to get better. That's a hard sell, frankly. They also think that there is not to be a literal

thousand-year kingdom as such, but that's just metaphoric for a long time and it simply indicates whatever the duration of that period where the influence of the church dominates the world after which Christ returns.

There is another form of that view called amillennialism...amillennialism. And you've probably heard about that. You can figure it out. The alpha privative in the Greek language means a negative, so there is the view that there is no Millennium, that what John is writing about in Revelation 20 is very vague, may refer to nothing other than a long time in which the church flourishes on earth, simply referring to that kingdom which is spiritual...that is the rule of Christ over those who belong to Him while on earth. And there are others who believe that that refers to heaven, that refers to the experience of the saints in heaven. But for certain, according to amillennialists, there will be no thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. When He comes, everything ends immediately. No kingdom on earth ruled by Christ before He gets here, and no kingdom on earth ruled by Christ after He gets here.

Now the truth of the matter is, those are just two ways to look at the same thing. Post-millennialism and amillennialism is really the same thing. I like to call amillennialism negative, and postmillennialism positive. That's just two ways to look at the same thing. It's two ways to view human history. One says it's not the Kingdom. The other says it is the Kingdom. One says moving toward the coming of Christ there will be no Kingdom. The other says there will be a Kingdom. But in both cases it will be the flow of history under the influence of the church. So they're really looking at the same thing. One calls it a kingdom and says it will expand and expand and expand, that's the positive spin. The other looks at it as a spiritual kingdom also but says it will decline and decline and decline until Jesus finally comes.

But in both cases they would deny the actual thousand-year reign of Christ and they would deny that Christ will reign and rule on earth and literally fulfill all His promises to the nation Israel given in the Old Testament covenants. Whether you're an amillennialist or a postmillennialist, you basically say Israel forfeited all its promises, forfeited all its privileges, forfeited all those things that God declared in covenant that He would give to them in the future and they forfeit it by their disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant, by their apostasy from true religion and by their rejection of their Messiah. Therefore, Israel has been permanently set aside so that the only Kingdom will be that Kingdom that we call the church ruled by Christ either expanding to take over the world, or existing in the world, and finally in heaven.

But in any case...and by the way, postmillennialists and amillennialists differ as to the details of these kinds of things. No sense in going in to all of that except to say in both cases they say there is no actual earthly reign of Christ fulfilling all Old Testament covenant promises.

Now against those two is the view called premillennialism. That means there will be a Millennium and prior to that Millennium Jesus will come. He comes pre, not post. He comes before. He will return to an increasingly wicked earth. He will come in fiery judgment. He will judge all the ungodly of all the earth and then establish His rule and His Kingdom forever. The first phase of that eternal rule will be His reign on this earth which will last as Revelation 20 says six times, a thousand years. After which His rule will continue because it is an everlasting rule, but it will continue in a new heaven and a new earth that replace this heaven and earth which will melt in an atomic implosion and make way for the new creation.

Those are the views. Now we're going to dig a little more deeply into the whole idea of the Millennial Kingdom and what the Bible says about it and as to its nature and the aspects of the Kingdom that are revealed in Scripture. And by the way, they are many and they are wondrous to behold and we will do that. But I want to approach this whole thing with you as my congregation the way I did with three thousand five hundred pastors a couple of weeks ago.

Now when they came here, I'm very much aware that many of them are amillennialists. Some of them are post-millennialists, although there are fewer and fewer of those if you read the paper and have your eyes open and you're breathing and your body has any temperature at all, you know things aren't getting better. But some are holding on to what they have taught in the past. I guess self-preservation dominates their theology at that point. But there is a growing influence of amillennialism because amillennialism has been a part of reformed theology. Reformed theology has made a monumental comeback in this culture and thankfully so because it is biblical. The Reformers had it right on most issues. But they never got around to eschatology. They never got around to applying their formidable skills. You cannot fight the war on every front. And at the great time of the Reformation, they were fighting the war where the battle raged the hottest and that was over the gospel and over the nature of Christ and over salvation by grace through faith and over the authority of Scripture. They were fighting the massive Roman system. And being occupied on those fronts, they never really got to the front of eschatology, they didn't really get to the front of ecclesiology either, the study of the church. But those two kind of go together, as we'll see in this study, in some very fascinating ways.

So, it is really one of the strange ironies of Reformed Theology. And therefore it's a strange irony in the church today that those who love the doctrine of sovereign election most, that would be Reformed theologians, those who love the doctrine of sovereign election most supremely and who love that doctrine most sincerely and...this is going to be a long sentence...and who are most unwavering in their devotion to the glory of God, the honor of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, the veracity and inerrancy of Scripture, those who are usually the most fastidious in Bible interpretation, yes those who are the most careful and intentionally biblical regarding all categories of doctrine, those who see themselves as guardians of biblical truth, those who are passionate to get it right, those who are not content to be wrong at all, and those who most heartily agree on the essential matters of Christian truth so that they labor with all their powers to examine in a Berean fashion every relevant text to discern the true interpretation of all matters of divine revelation are...and there's the main verb in the sentence...are in varying degrees of disinterest in applying their skills to the end of the story and rather content to be in happy if not playful disagreement in regard to the vast biblical data on eschatology as if the end doesn't matter much...period. Or another way to say it would be this, how many of you have attended an amillennial prophecy conference? There isn't such a thing. If you don't know what you believe about the future, you can't preach on it.

Whether you are a pessimistic amillennialist, or an optimistic amillennialist, that's a post-millennialist, you don't know what to do with prophetic truth because if you interpret prophetic truth in the same normal natural way you interpret all the rest of the passages of Scripture, you're going to end up a pre-millennialist. It's inevitable. And so you have to change the rules of interpretation. And once you say the Bible doesn't mean what it says, then we have no idea what it means. Certainly you have no idea what it means, neither does anybody else.

Another way to see this would be to ask this question...what other category of theology, what other category of theology except atheism starts with the alpha privative and labels itself as believing in something that doesn't exist? To say you're an amillennialist is only to tell me what you don't believe. And then you have to go to all of the passages of Scripture that talk about the Kingdom and tell me why you don't believe they mean what they say. It's a strange approach.

Does the end matter? I think it matters. I think it matters to God. It matters to me. It matters to me to understand what God has said about the end. It's the whole point of everything else. It's the whole point of the beginning and the middle. The end is as divinely designed as the beginning. And God has given us massive amounts of revelation in the Scripture about the future. It has to matter to us. In fact, some say nearly one fourth of Scripture is prophetic. God filled the Bible with prophecy and much of it looking to the end. Did God do this but somehow mumble? Did He do it and somehow muddle it so hopelessly that the high ground for Bible students and the high ground for theologians is to recognize the muddle and abandon the perspicuity or the clarity of Scripture on that subject? Is that what God wanted us to do? To look at it and say, "I can't figure this out, let's forget it?" There are whole denominations that are instructed not to teach on the end times. You would assume that they're confused because the Bible is confusing. And if the Bible is confusing, then God Himself is confused.

And so, working hard...and it is often hard work...to understand prophetic passages is needless. In fact, it's an impossible effort since it doesn't mean what it says and you have to sort of allegorize it or spiritualize it and therefore interpretations are myriad, they are as many as interpreters. Why bother? If it doesn't mean what it says, everybody's got a different view, then nobody has the authority to say this is true, let's just stick with things that we know are true and things that all the good theologians agree on. Because, you see, if it doesn't mean what it says it means, then any suggestion is as bad as any other suggestion. And I ask the question...are we supposed to be comfortable with the notion that the hard and fast and true principles of Bible interpretation have to be set aside in prophetic texts? But that is essentially what they're asking us to do.

Some of the most formidable amillennialists, and I'm talking about well-respected, very erudite influential theologians, say things like this, and I'll quote. O.T. Alyce(?), well known, says, "The Old Testament prophecies if literally interpreted cannot be regarded as having been yet fulfilled or being capable of fulfillment in the present age." That's true. If you interpret Old Testament prophecies literally, they cannot be fulfilled in this present age. And he is suggesting therefore that we can't interpret them literally because somehow we've got to make them fulfilled in this age because there is no future age. Floyd Hamilton in his book, *The Basis of Millennial Faiths*, says, and I quote, "Now we must frankly admit the literal interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies gives us just such a picture of an earthly reign of the Messiah as the pre-millennialist pictures." Now that's a fate worse than death. What he is saying is, a literal interpretation of the Old Testament is going to lead you to a pre-millennial view. And since we don't want to get there, we can't use a literal approach. Anything to avoid premillennialism, even if you change the rules of interpretation. Loraine Boettner wrote a book called *The Meaning of the Millennium*, this is what he said, "It is generally agreed that if the prophecies are taken literally, they do foretell a restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Palestine with the Jews having a prominent place in that Kingdom and ruling over the other nations." Out of their own mouth. What's wrong with that? Why do we want to run from that? Why do we want to change the rules in interpretation to avoid that?

The preconception is that we can't allow this to happen. We can't have those prophecies come to pass with regard to Israel with an earthly, literal Kingdom the way the Old Testament seems to be saying it. So, set aside normal, natural, literal interpretation. But let me tell you something. Normal, natural, literal interpretation is the only way to stop abuse of Scripture. As soon as you abandon that, then it's fair game for anybody's craziness. If we're going to change the rules then, may I suggest this...and this is what I told the pastors. If we're going to change the rules, then we better have a Word from God. There should be a footnote in the chapter saying, "Please note, here comes a prophetic text, change the rules." We really need a divine mandate because I think God cares that we get it right. Would you agree? I think He cares that we get it right, that's why He wrote it and I think He understand that His glory is at stake and our hope and comfort is at stake and the evidence of God's massive moving in history is at stake with regard to the future. He wants us to get it right, that's why He put it in the Scripture and the Scripture is replete with it. So if we're going to change the rules of interpretation to inject in to Scripture a preconceived idea or to avoid what is obvious, we better be sure that we have a word from God.

Now there are people who do this to Genesis 1, 2 and 3. They don't want to accept that the entire universe was created in six nearly 24-hour days. They don't want to accept the fact that Adam and Eve were created full grown male and female, not the result of an evolutionary process. But if you read Genesis 1 through 3, it's pretty clear the evening and the morning were the first day, the evening and the morning were the second day, the evening and the morning were the third day, daylight and dark, daylight and dark, that's 24-hour period, God creates everything. And for most evangelicals, for most people who hold to a sound, biblical view and Reform Theology, they would live and die that the text of Genesis 1 through 3 means exactly what it says it means because that's the only way to interpret Scripture. Some people want to turn it into ages. There's nothing in there that does that. There's nothing in the text itself that does that. Some people try to call it poetry, but it's clearly not poetry. It has none of the earmarks of poetry, none of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry. It is narrative history. And we fight sometimes tooth and nail to maintain the literal veracity of Genesis 1 through 3. Why then if we are so committed to protecting the text of the beginning in its literal nature are we so fast to give up the texts of the end and their literal nature? It makes no sense. Where is the divine mandate to do that? What passage is it in? Show it to me.

And by the way, if we change the rules, what are the new ones? And who made them? And by what authority? Now here comes the real irony. This is the real irony. Those who most celebrate the sovereign grace of election, that's the Reformed, and they are typically amillennial, those who most celebrate the sovereign grace of election regarding the church and its inviolable place in God's purpose from predestination before the foundation of the world to glorification in the future, those who most celebrate the sovereign grace of election, those who most aggressively, most militantly, and most capably defend the truth of Scripture regarding this election being divine, unilateral, unconditional, irrevokable by nature for the church, that's for us, so that whatever God chose to do, He will do, that whatever He began to do He will complete, those who will defend that to their last breath, God's irrevokable, unconditional, unilateral, sovereign election will bring those He has chosen to the fulfillment of all that He has promised them. They will die for that truth regarding the church, but unashamedly abandon that same truth for the elect nation of Israel.

Why? It's the same God, same terminology. Scripture affirms the perpetuity of the elect church to salvation glory, that all whom the Lord has chosen He brings to glory. In similar language, Scripture

affirms the perpetuity of ethnic Israel to a future salvation and a future Kingdom as a race of people and that in that salvation and in that Kingdom will be the fulfillment of all divine promises given to them in the Old Testament, repeated in the New Testament and through them to the world. Whether you're talking about the church as God's elect, or Israel as God's elect, both are God's elect. And again I say, His election is divine, unilateral, unconditional, and irrevokable. So, I told the pastors at the conference, the title of this talk is, "Why every self-respecting Calvinist has to be a pre-millennialist." Because, if you believe in divine sovereign election, then you have to believe that if God will be faithful to His promises to His church, He will also be faithful to His promises to His elect nation Israel.

Now frankly it's too late for John Calvin to fix his work, although he is now a premillennialist in heaven. If only he could just send down one message, that might be it. But, you know, of all the people on the planet who should be premillennialists, it should be those who believe in divine sovereign election, of all people Arminians, not Armenians, that's different. Those who follow Arminius did not believe in election. Arminius did not believe in election. Those who follow him do not believe in election, that is a large part of evangelical Christianity, the Wesleyan Movement, Charismatic Movement, Methodists, etc., etc., many Baptists. They believe God elects nobody to salvation. They believe that salvation can be gained and lost. You can believe and be saved and then you can forfeit your salvation.

Now they make perfect amillennialists. That's a perfect setup for them. God doesn't choose you, you choose Him. You can choose Him and then not choose Him, and then choose Him again and then not choose Him. You make the decision and so all of the promises of God are conditional on you. Amillennialism really seems to fit them. But not us who live and breathe the rarified air of sovereign grace and election, it makes no sense to me.

In the modern theological world, I say leave amillennialism to the process theologians. Have you ever heard of that? Let me give you a theology lesson here a little bit. Process theology, they are the theologians, liberal theologians, who believe that God is in process of becoming what He will be. He's getting better. As more and more information comes to Him and as He has more and more experience in dealing with the issues of His universe, He's getting better at being God. He's improving. He's definitely on the upward curve. This is process theology. God is just trying to find His way through the melee of choices and decisions, through the endless vicissitudes and choices that everything and everyone makes through the all the numberless issues in this massive universe that are going on, He's sorting it all out as He goes.

Now I told you a few weeks ago why people believe that, because they want to get God off the hook so He's not responsible for evil. He's happy to take the responsibility for allowing evil for His own glory. In fact, the worst evil that's ever been done on the history of the world was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And by that the worst evil, He gained the greatest glory. But they want to get God off the hook so they say He's really not responsible, He's really not in charge of anything. He's just trying to figure it out. That's called Process Theology.

The other view is called Openness Theology, same thing. It simply means God has no idea what the future is. He doesn't know the future because it hasn't happened. He's not predicting the future because you can't predict what hasn't happened, it doesn't exist.

The bottom line is we're in charge. We chart the course and God reacts. Even His promises may not be valid because He made them with inadequate information. He made them in the past when He didn't know what He now knows because what was going to happen hadn't happened. Only now has it happened so His promises may not be trustworthy since they were given in the past before so many things happened that He didn't know were coming to past.

So I say, leave amillennialism to those kinds of people who do not believe in the sovereign unilateral irrevokable divine electing power of God. Leave it to the semi-Pelagians and Pelagians who go in and out of salvation. It makes sense for their theology. Israel sinned, you're out. Israel sinned, the promises cancelled. Israel disobeyed the Law, you're done. Israel crucifies the Messiah, that's it. You forfeit everything and God gives it to somebody else, namely the church. And we hope the church can do better than Israel or the church will forfeit it all as well. So this is a classic perfect fit for Arminian theology.

But for those who get it, for those who understand it, for those who embrace God's sovereignty that He is the only one who can determine who will be saved and blessed and He is the only one who can save and bless, then saying that He cancelled promises to Israel because they didn't believe is completely inconsistent. How could they believe unless He caused them to believe? How could He hold them responsible for not believing? How could He hold any of us in one sense, responsible for not believing...we are responsible for our sin, but in the end we believe because He moves on us.

There are two great elect people in the Bible...Israel and the church. And Israel is elect as the church is elect. The New Testament is full of comments about the church being the elect. But in the Old Testament, for example, Isaiah 45:4, "Israel, Mine elect. I have even called thee by thy name." Isaiah 65:9, "Mine elect shall inherit it, the promises of God." Isaiah 65, really the whole chapter is about Israel, God's elect. Verse 22, "My elect...again...shall enjoy long the work of their hands." Israel repeatedly called God's elect, we know what that means.

Now why am I making a case for this? Because when you understand God's purpose for Israel, you now have the foundation for all eschatology...all eschatology. You get your eschatology right when you get Israel right. You get Israel right when you get the Old Testament covenants and promises with Israel right. You get the Old Testament covenants and promises right when you get the interpretation of Scripture right. You get the interpretation of Scripture right when you're faithful to valid rules of interpretation. So you interpret it right and that will allow you to understand the meaning of the Covenants and the future of Israel, and God's integrity is at stake. Over 200 times in the Bible God is called the God of Israel. Over two hundred times the God of Israel. There are over two thousand references to Israel in Scripture. Not one of them means anything but Israel. So if you say the promises of the Old Testament that refer to Israel really meant the church, you have no precedent for such an interpretation. Not one reference anywhere in Scripture and there are over two thousand, referring to Israel means anything other than Israel. There are 73 references in the New Testament, each of them refers to Israel.

And may I remind you that you have one very, very important reality to deal with, in case you think there's no future in Israel, living Israelites. What's that about? You never met a Hittite, an Amorite, a

Hivite, a Jebusite, or any other ite...they have long since morphed into the melee and the mix of the races. But we now have pure Israelites. That in itself is an indication of God's preservation for their future. Seventy percent, by the way, of Scripture is the story of Israel, start to finish. Not that they were the end, but they were the means to the end. Not that they were the only ones to be saved, but they were the ones through whom God will eventually reach and even set up His Son to rule over the nations.

So here's how to get the foundation for a good sound eschatology. Get election right. Get Israel right. You got it. Cause what that means is God does know the future, God has set the future and the future involves not only the glory of His church but the fulfillment of His elect people Israel with regard to everything that He promised that nation. And there are a lot of people who get the first one right, they get election right, and they don't get Israel right and they are lost when it comes to eschatology. And I'm confident that God didn't reveal prophetic truth in so much detail to hide anything, to obscure the truth, but to reveal it for our blessing, our motivation, and His glory. So my words to you are really very simple foundational words. I say this, if you want to understand what the Bible says about the future, get these two things right...the sovereignty of God in election, and the promises of that sovereign electing God to those people to whom He has elected...His redeemed church and Israel. Return the sovereignty of God in election to its rightful place, return the nation Israel to its rightful place, and your eschatology will unfold in beautiful clarity.

And I'm really grateful that the Spirit of God is moving the way He is these days, and moving in the church to reestablish the glorious high ground of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Now it is time to reestablish the high ground of sovereign grace for a future generation of ethnic Israel in salvation and the messianic earthly Kingdom. If you get that right, your eschatology will come crystal clear.

I have thought about these things, by the way, for a long time. I've been here at Grace Church well...what thirty-some years, prior to that I thought about it a lot. When I was in seminary I thought about it. I guess for about 50 years I've been thinking about eschatology, the time of the end. And the longer I think about it and the more I study the Scripture, the clearer it becomes to me. In fact, I understand sovereign electing grace much more clearly than I ever have in the past and I also understand God's sovereign electing purpose for Israel more clearly than I've ever understood it. I have never moved away from my conviction about these two things. They've been refined, clarified, expanded, enriched through these 50 years. But I was convinced when I started. I had, as theologians might call it, my own my own *ordo(?) eschaton*, that would be the chronological sequence of the end times. I saw it in Scripture when I was young. I saw it in Scripture because it was so crystal clear. It's there. I remember when I flew to Kazakstan(?), in about a 35 or 38 hour flight. Got off the plane at seven o'clock in the morning to speak at a conference, there were 1600 pastors from central Asia, the first Central Asian Pastors Conference in history after the breakup of the Soviet Union. And I went there and I spoke for a week and they finally said to me, "When are you going to tell us the good part?"

I said, "Well what's the good part?"

They said, "We don't know about the future. We want to know about the future. Tell us about the future." They were in a very hopeless situation, having very little in life.



I said, "Sure, I'll take all day Friday, I'll tell you the future." So I just marched them through the order of the chronology of eschatology as it's laid out clearly both in the Old and the New Testament. And I finished, I had no idea what they believed... 1600 pastors and leaders from central Asia. I never have even been there. And the group that led the conference came to me afterwards with smiles on their faces and said, "You believe exactly what we believe." This isn't something for people who have been highly educated, this is something for people who haven't been corrupted by education.

I was talking to one of our missionaries just this same week I gave this talk to the pastors, and he was coming back from China and he said, "There's only one view in the church in China and it's the pre-millennial view." Of course, because they just take what Scripture says. I've been teaching and preaching the Bible expositionally now for over 40 years, one verse at a time. I have dragged you through virtually every verse in the New Testament. We still have Mark to go but there are only a couple of discourses and a couple of miracles in Mark that aren't in the other three gospels, so not a lot of new material. I've dragged myself through all these years of the discipline of study. And I've gone back after I preach and I've written commentaries, now I think 26 or 27 volumes on the New Testament, back through the same material again and again and again and again and again so that this understanding of eschatology has had to stand the acid test of every text. In the meantime, I've continued to study the Old Testament to write all the footnotes for the MacArthur Study Bible through the entire Old Testament. I've preached through many of the books of the Old Testament, the first eleven chapters of Genesis through Daniel, Zechariah, the minor prophets and pieces and bits of Isaiah and others in the Old Testament. And so I think it's a fair test to see whether eschatology holds up. And I can only tell you, I am unwaveringly committed to the sovereign election of a future generation of Jews to salvation and the full inheritance of all the promises and covenants of God given to them in the Old Testament. I'm unwaveringly committed to that.

Now I know at this point somebody out there is going to say, "Oh boy, he's in to the Left Behindseries." No...I'm not in to Rapture-fiction and I'm not in to wacky charts. You don't see me up here with a big chart and a stick. And I'm not in to newspaper exegesis where you...everything that happens in the news fulfills some obscure Old Testament prophecy. And I'm not in to all kinds of complex charts, and I'm not in to all that is traditionally known as dispensationalism, seven dispensations, two kingdoms, two New Covenants, two ways of salvation, discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New. I'm not talking about that, relax. Set all that aside. I reject the wacky world of newspaper exegesis and cartoon eschatology and crazy interpretation like the locusts of Revelation 9 being helicopters, etc.

Look, I reject all those really abusive and bizarre kinds of interpretation, but frankly, they're no more wacky than the interpretations of the amillennialists who want to take the entire book of Revelation and stuff it into the events of 70 A.D. and a few years afterwards and come up with things that are just as ridiculous.

And by the way, dispensationalists...people say, "Well, that whole pre-millennial view, that came out of C.I. Scofield, that came out of J.N. Darby, that came out of that whole dispensational system." No it didn't. There's a recovery of pre-millennialism in the modern era and the recovery of pre-millennialism in the modern era came from two very unlikely sources. An Anglican...an Anglican by the name of Willing Cunningham in 1815 wrote a book called The Premillennial Advent. He was anything but a dispensationalist. But even more interesting, in England in 1827 there was a publication affirming pre-millennialism, the coming of Christ and the establishment of His millennial

kingdom, written by a Jesuit priest reading his Bible by the name of Manuel DeLacunza Edios(???). So we can set aside the idea that somehow this is rooted in wacky dispensationalism, it is not. This is simply a way to understand Scripture in its normal sense.

Now, I'm going to save the good stuff till next time, but I want to just end by giving you a little list of benefits of getting your eschatology right. Okay? Like all divine truth, getting the future truth right is beneficial.

Turn to Revelation chapter 1. This up to now has been more like a lecture, but turn to Revelation chapter 1 and just look at verse 3 for a moment. Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it for the time is near." What you have here is a benediction from God. "Blessed is he who reads and understands the book of Revelation."

Some people say, "How...how in the world can you understand it?" They understood it in China without anything but a Bible. Understood it in Central Asia without anything but a Bible. You take it at face value. Oh sure, it helps to know some history and some background, but this is a pronounced blessing. Along that line, I went to Moody Press and I said, "Look, I've written two volumes on Revelation...I don't know, it's 800 or 900 pages, and I realized not everybody is going to go through all of that. It's just a lot of material." So I said, "Would you do me a favor? Let me condense that down, just squeeze it down to about 350 pages because if people read this and understand it, they're going to be blessed by God."

And they said sure. So they did it and we distributed that at the Shepherds Conference, 350 page version of Revelation in which the full interpretation is provided there. Of course, you can advance to the full two volumes if you'd like. But we distributed that and I arranged, and I don't know when it's going to happen for you, I arranged to get a copy for every family at Grace Church as a gift. Now the only thing that I ask is, that you read it. And the only reason I ask you to read it is so that you may be...what?...blessed.

Now understanding the future, that's a general statement that you would be blessed. But look at just a couple of other things quickly. First John 3 verse 2. "Beloved...1 John 3:2...now are we the children of God, it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears...Second Coming...we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is and everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure." Getting your eschatology right will bless you. And getting your eschatology right will purify you. You have this hope as a purifying hope. We'll see more about how that works.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 15...1 Corinthians 15. Well this is such a great chapter. Verse 51, "I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, we shall be changed in a moment, the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet, the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed," that's the Rapture. We're going to study the Rapture. "For this perishable must put on the imperishable. This mortal must put on immortality." And then he goes on to talk about the fact that in that moment, in that event, death is swallowed up in victory. "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, the power of sin is the law, thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." So here we're living in the view of our eschatological triumph in

Christ, the glory of the Rapture, the last trump, rising from the grave made imperishable and immortal. And then the effect of it is in verse 58. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast immovable." And you can stop right there.

Do you know...are you watching this media, all this panic about global warming and all this panic about the end of the world and asteroids crashing into the earth? That's for people who don't know this, that the way history ends is with Jesus coming and taking us away. And so we stand steadfast, immovable. I don't know about you but I really can't get too worked up about green house gases. They don't phase me. I have absolu...they can try to terrify me with all this stuff, I am unmoved. I know where history is going.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. First Thessalonians chapter 4, another Rapture passage, great one. Verse 16, "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ shall rise first. We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, thus shall we always be with the Lord." Here's the application, "Therefore, do...what?...comfort one another." You have nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. The Lord's coming back. Blessing, purity, stability, comfort. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9...2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9, "We have as our ambition whether at home or absent," that is whether in heaven or here, "to be pleasing to Him...to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." That's part of the coming eschatology. There's a Rapture and there's a Bema Seat Judgment. We know that. And at that judgment, we'll be recompensed for the deeds done in the body whether they are good or *phaulos*, meaning useless. We know that so our ambition is when we get to that place to be rewarded because we are pleasing to Him.

If you look at Acts 3:19, Peter says, "Repent therefore and return that your sins may be wiped away in order that times of refreshing," that's the Millennium, "may come from the presence of the Lord that He may send Jesus the Christ appointed for you whom heaven must receive till the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."

So having your eschatology in place may lead you to repentance. All of these are benefits of getting it right. When Frederic the Great called his chaplain in and he said, "I want proof of the truthfulness of the Bible, and I want it briefly." The chaplain replied, "Sir, I can give you proof of the truthfulness of the Bible in one word, Israel."

Do you understand the massive apologetic power of the existence of Israel as an ethnic people in their own land? Staggering. How do you explain that? As one prominent amillennialist said when asked, "What is the biblical significance of the existence of Jews in their land?" And he said, "It has no significance at all." Really? It is the single most inexplicable story in human history that this small group of beleaguered people attacked and assaulted by everybody around them for centuries still exists as a pure ethnic race. Now if you want to get the future right, you've got to get Israel right and you've got to get God's sovereign electing purpose right.

All right, that's the introduction. Now next time I'm going to take you through a series of about five questions that we're going to ask and see how this plays out on the pages of Scripture, okay? And you've been great tonight. This is more like a theological lecture. I don't do this to you every often,

but I hope you feel like it was helpful and anchored you in this great and important truth. And what's at stake here? Not just the future of Israel but our confidence in the Word of God. All right.

Father, we thank You for a great evening together, wonderful testimonies, great fellowship and how...how good it is to think deeply and broadly about the glory of Your Word. May we be faithful to take it, to interpret it as you intended for us to, so that it can yield to us the wonderful rich blessings that You have promised. We want the Word to bless, to make us pure, to stabilize us, to comfort us, to give us a passion for evangelism. We want the Word to cause us to live lives pleasing to You. We know that Word about the future has that power. May it be powerful in our lives. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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