

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship
January 3, 2021
“Don’t Major in the Minors”

Sunday school at 8:30, Service at 9:15, Service at 10:45 with King’s Kids.

NEWS

Use the “Mask,” “No mask,” as an opportunity to be Christlike to others.
 Wednesday Night Activities at 6:30 PM

330 N. Somers Rd. (Mail: PO Box 10626) Kalispell, MT 59904~ (406) 755-1776

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Don’t be divisive over things that are not salvific. The problem with that idea, is as soon as I say it, divisive people extrapolate the most insignificant bit of doctrine to be salvific.

The slippery slope is a logically fallacious argument. Everything is a slippery slope to anything.

Eschatology is a branch of Theology (study of God) that studies the _____.

Premillennial means that Jesus will Return before the Millennium (usually with the idea that it is after the Tribulation and that Christ will rule earth for a literal _____ years.

Pretribulation means a “_____” of the church before the Tribulation.

Darby was divisive - don’t be like Darby (Titus 3:10&11, I Timothy 2:5).

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

No one in the history of mankind has had perfect doctrine. If that is the requirement...

Jesus is “The way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him” (John 14:6).

The coming and the end happen together. The “Coming” is the word παρουσία (pä-rü-sē-ä), in the absolute sense. It isn’t that the dignitary is going to come, but that they are already on their way. Their arrival is certain, and it is soon. Every time that it refers to Jesus, it is His Second Coming at the End of the Age.

The two most common schemes in Christianity are Dispensational Pretribulation, Premillennialism and Amillennialism usually associated with Covenant Theology.

The first, formalized by Darby became popular in early 1900’s America.

The second has been a major scheme since the first century.

Amillennialists believe that they are already living in both the Tribulation and the Millennium. A war rages between sin and grace. They think the Tribulation will progressively get worse until Christ returns with His army. As He is Coming down, Christians will be Raptured up to join Him. Evil is defeated and then the Judgment.

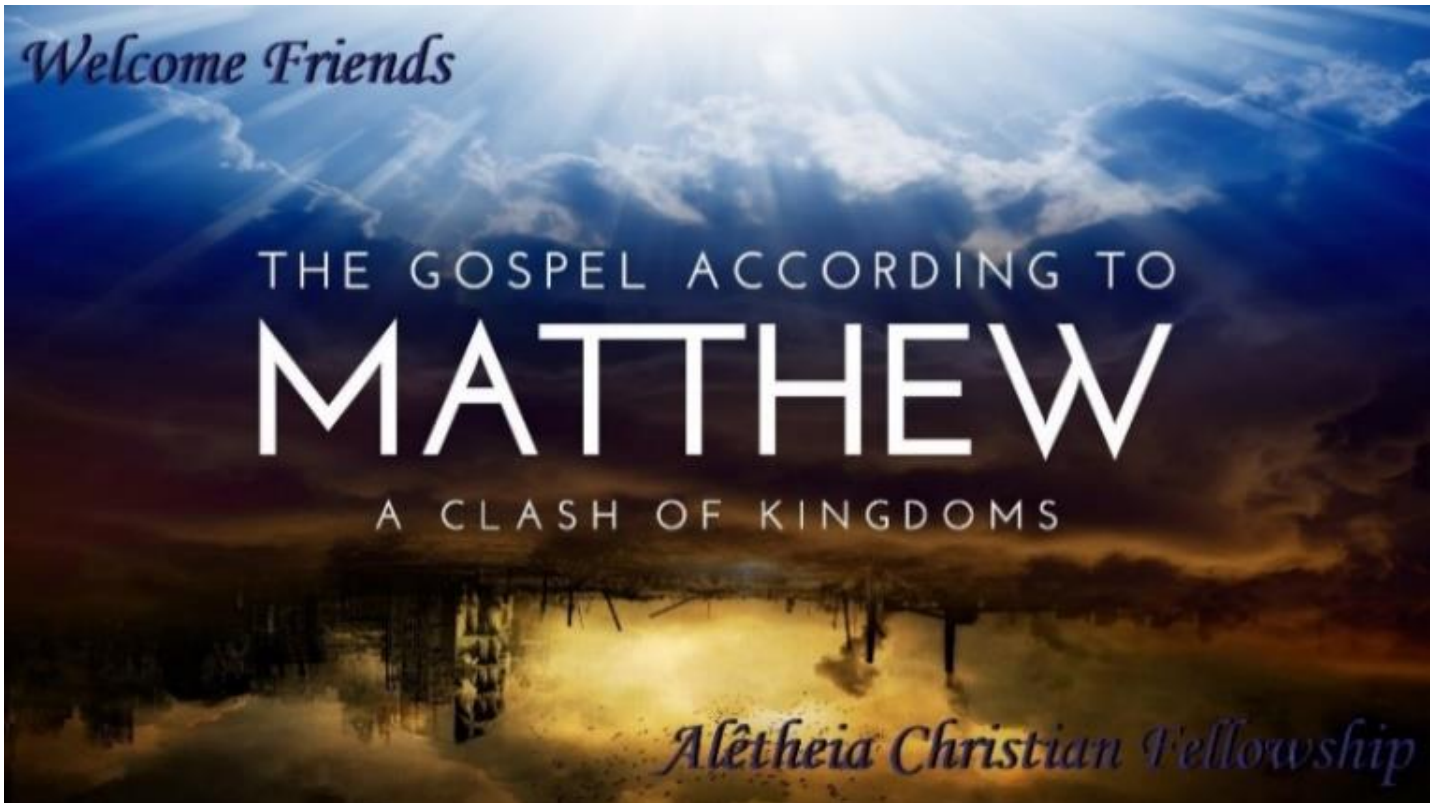
MATTHEW 24:9-13 ~

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon/Elder

Name _____ Address _____

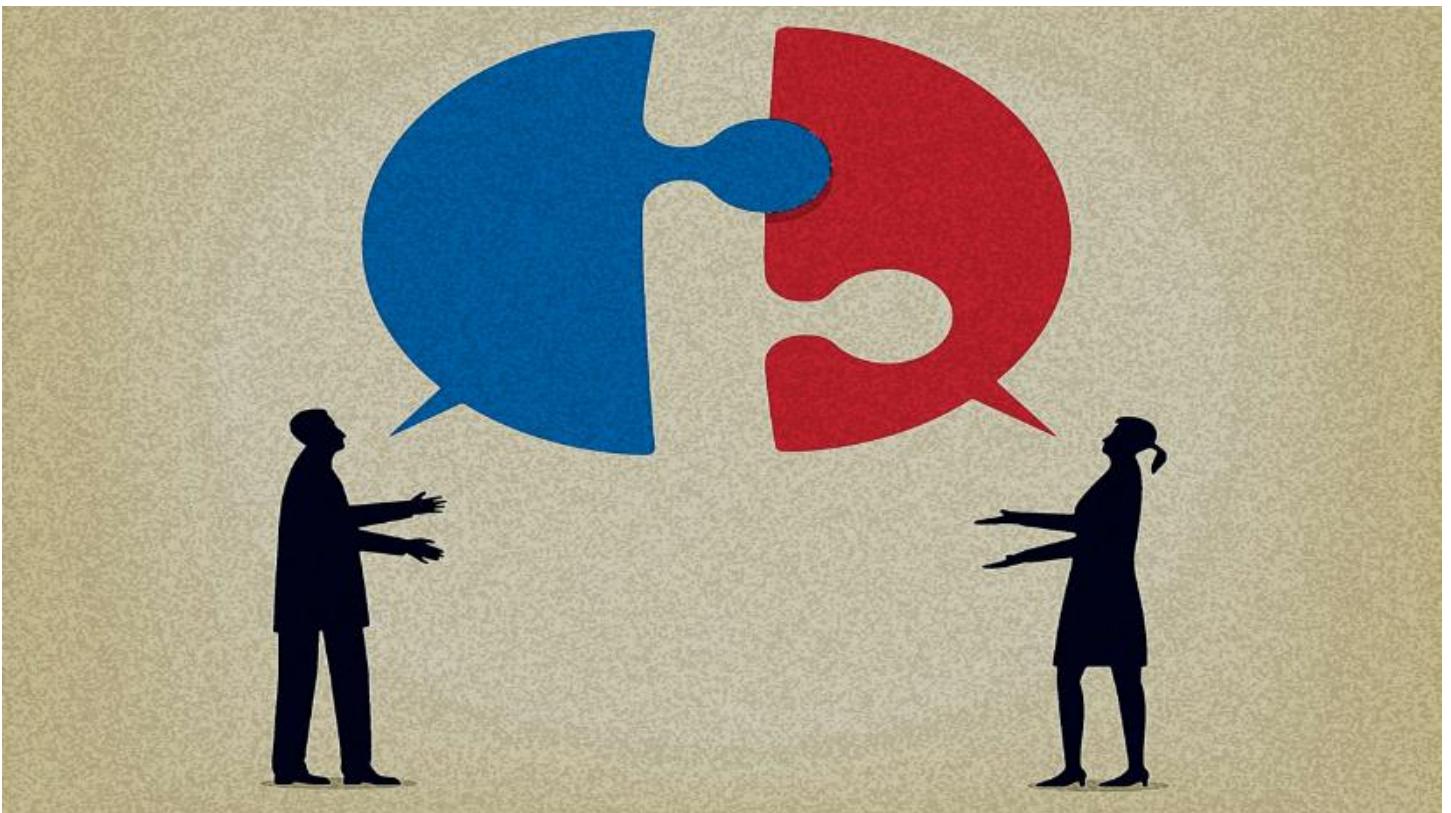
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Alêtheia ~ Matthew 24d ~ 010321
“Don’t Major in the Minors”



Last week, as part of the big overview of chapters 24&25, I read those chapters. Honestly, we are not nearly as comfortable hearing a lengthy bit of reading as people were in the first century. We are all about the multimedia, special effects, entertainment extravaganza. We are simply not used to being read to anymore.

So, it doesn't work for us as well as it did for our ancestors, but hopefully, you at least got the flow and context.



Now, we'll go back over the material a little more carefully. As we do, please do not lose the big picture

of the two chapters taken together, or of the big picture of knowing that divisions over doctrine is precisely what Satan desires.

The title of last week's sermon was, "Don't major in the minors." What it means is don't be divisive over things that are not salvific. The problem with that idea, is as soon as I say it, divisive people extrapolate the most insignificant bit of doctrine out to a place where it becomes salvific.

I saw Mary wearing a top that was too low cut. I told her it was a sin and she told me to mind my own business. Well, God's Holy Word tells us that women must dress with "Proper clothing that is modest and discreet" (I Timothy 2:9). Mary is in blatant violation of God's command, she refuses to obey, therefore she can't be led by the Holy Spirit and so, is not filled by the Spirit and therefore cannot be a Christian at all - Mary is an antichrist! Stone her!

You can take anything and extrapolate it out to make it a far bigger issue than it is... We do it all the time. especially with our ridiculous slippery slope fallacious arguments. My friends, everything is a slippery slope to anything else you want to extrapolate it out to. "If I

submit and wear a mask... extrapolation, extrapolation, extrapolation... America will become a socialist dictatorship.”

“If my Presbyterian friend who was baptized as a baby isn’t rebaptized as an adult, he is not following Christ in His example, and therefore cannot possibly be saved. Since he is a false Christian, I must shun him.” That’s how it goes, Lord help us.

We talked about the father of Dispensationalism and with it Pretribulational, Premillennial, eschatology. Those are big words... Eschatology is the study of the End... That they have a branch of Theology dedicated to that, is probably why we’re all so confused today. Premillennial just means that Jesus will stay on earth ruling as King for a literal 1,000 years. Pretribulational means a Rapture of Christians before the Tribulation starts. Anyway, the guy who gets the credit for working it out was Darby.

WATCH OUT FOR PEOPLE WHO CAUSE DIVISIONS AND UPSET PEOPLE'S FAITH BY TEACHING THINGS CONTRARY TO WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT.

STAY AWAY FROM THEM. SUCH PEOPLE ARE NOT SERVING CHRIST OUR LORD; THEY ARE SERVING THEIR OWN PERSONAL INTERESTS.



He was so rigid, so divisive in his personality that, as I said last week, he ended up rejecting every Christian except those very few who would agree with him on every point of his new theology. If anyone, no matter how close to him, disagreed with any bit of his doctrine they were shunned... He would not have Communion with them, he would not fellowship with them, he would not associate with them, he would not even acknowledge them as Christian. Today, the denomination he founded will not allow you to have Communion with them until you prove yourself worthy by agreeing to their doctrine.

It's a cult. What's weird is that the vast majority of Christians reject nearly all Darby advocated, except his Dispensational Eschatology. We normally reject everything coming from a cult leader, don't we?

We had a dude in this church - twice actually - who reminds me of Darby. There are some people who are just plain divisive. It is fundamentally because they are fearful and insecure. They want to be right, even if that means everyone else is wrong. It makes them feel powerful, in the know and so, better than others. The Bible does say, ¹⁰Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned (Titus 3:10&11).

All of that to say that I cannot possibly overstate the importance of unity in the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot do that if we puff ourselves up with our own self-importance by being dogmatically opinionated. So please hold your opinions loosely.



Of course, someone will worry that I'm advocating some kind of ecumenical Unitarianism... No not all paths lead to God. God has provided the path to Him through the Word made flesh. There is no other way for anyone past, present or future to get to God. No other way, period. All those who were God's without having any opportunity to accept Jesus will be given that opportunity. In other words, Father Abraham, will be in Heaven with us, not because of the Covenant he participated in, or slept through. Not because he was ready to sacrifice Isaac. Not because he obeyed God, or trusted God, or loved God, but because he will greedily accept the sacrifice of Jesus on his own behalf, just as everyone who enters Heaven must.

Forget about Covenants and forget about Dispensations... There is only “One mediator between human beings and Almighty God and that is Jesus” (I Timothy 2:5).

It is God, and only God, Who saves and He has chosen to do so through His Word. When we are divisive over doctrine, we are saying that salvation is about us human beings getting it right... Can you see that?

No one in the history of mankind has had perfect doctrine. If that is the requirement, we are all doomed. So, at what degree of perfect doctrine is the cutoff? Is it 80% correct doctrine? 70%? What is the minimum acceptable score on the Theology test to get into Heaven?

I'll tell you that you get a perfect score if you answer Jesus is “The way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him” (John 14:6), on every question. Just write that in for every question and you'll get 100%



So, remember the scene, Jesus blasted hypocritical religious legalism for an entire chapter and in so doing pronounced judgment upon Israel.

His Disciples were shocked - how could this be? They were LITERALLY following the Messiah, Who was to make everything perfectly wonderful. Not only had He repeatedly talked about His own betrayal and death...Now He was talking about the devastation of the nation, the destruction of the Temple, and the ruination of the Jewish people. What gives?

They had pointed out the magnificence of the city and the Temple to Jesus. "Look!" they said. To which Jesus

curtly responded, “Not one stone here will be left upon another.” Figuratively, that means total devastation... What?!?



Jesus sat down as a sign that they could come to Him and receive instruction and clarification. So, it was Jesus sitting on the mountain opposite the Temple no doubt looking right at it. His personal disciples were His audience. It seems as though they asked three questions. “When will these things happen,” and “What will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?”

When will the city and Temple be destroyed, what will be the sign of Your coming and then separately, what will be the sign of the end of the age?

That's only possible in English. The underlying Greek makes the second part a single question. It is essentially a hendiadys. The two parts are governed by a single article and so the two parts are two ways of describing different aspects of one big event. The coming and the end happen together.



The “Coming” is the word παρουσία (pä-rü-sē-ä), a noun derived from the verb (πάρειμι), to come along side me, so to be present. The noun παρουσία can have the meaning to be in the presence of someone.

That meaning has led some astray. Words have a range of meaning. You cannot look up a word and pick the meaning you like best. Grammatical structures, historic precedent, and context tell us which meaning the speaker intended.

Here, grammatically παρουσία is used in the absolute sense, historically, in this construction, it functions as a technical term for the official arrival of a deity, a king, or other important dignitary. Contextually, we narrow it further to the official return of Christ in His Second Coming.

The cool thing about the word in this sense, is it isn't that the person is going to come, but that they are on their way. It's like a lookout from the village is on a high hill overlooking the road. They see the king's retinue and entourage coming. They run down the hill and over to the village shouting all the way, He's coming, He's coming. It is just like Paul Revere riding into town supposedly shouting, "The Red Coats are coming, the Red Coats are coming!" It means that they are already on their way and their arrival is certain and it is soon.



This arrival, or advent, or coming, in Greek directly gives us our highfalutin, technical, Theological term, Parousia. It means the Second Coming of Christ. If you ever hear an egghead use the word Parousia, they are talking about the Lord's Return in His full Glory to set everything right.

Matthew in verse 3, clearly has the Apostles referring to an official arrival of Jesus. A Coming that everywhere else in the entire Bible, specifically means Jesus' Second Coming. Biblically, the Second Coming is always the End of the Age. Matthew uses the term 4 times in chapter 24 and other than that, never uses it anywhere else. Additionally, it is nowhere to be found in

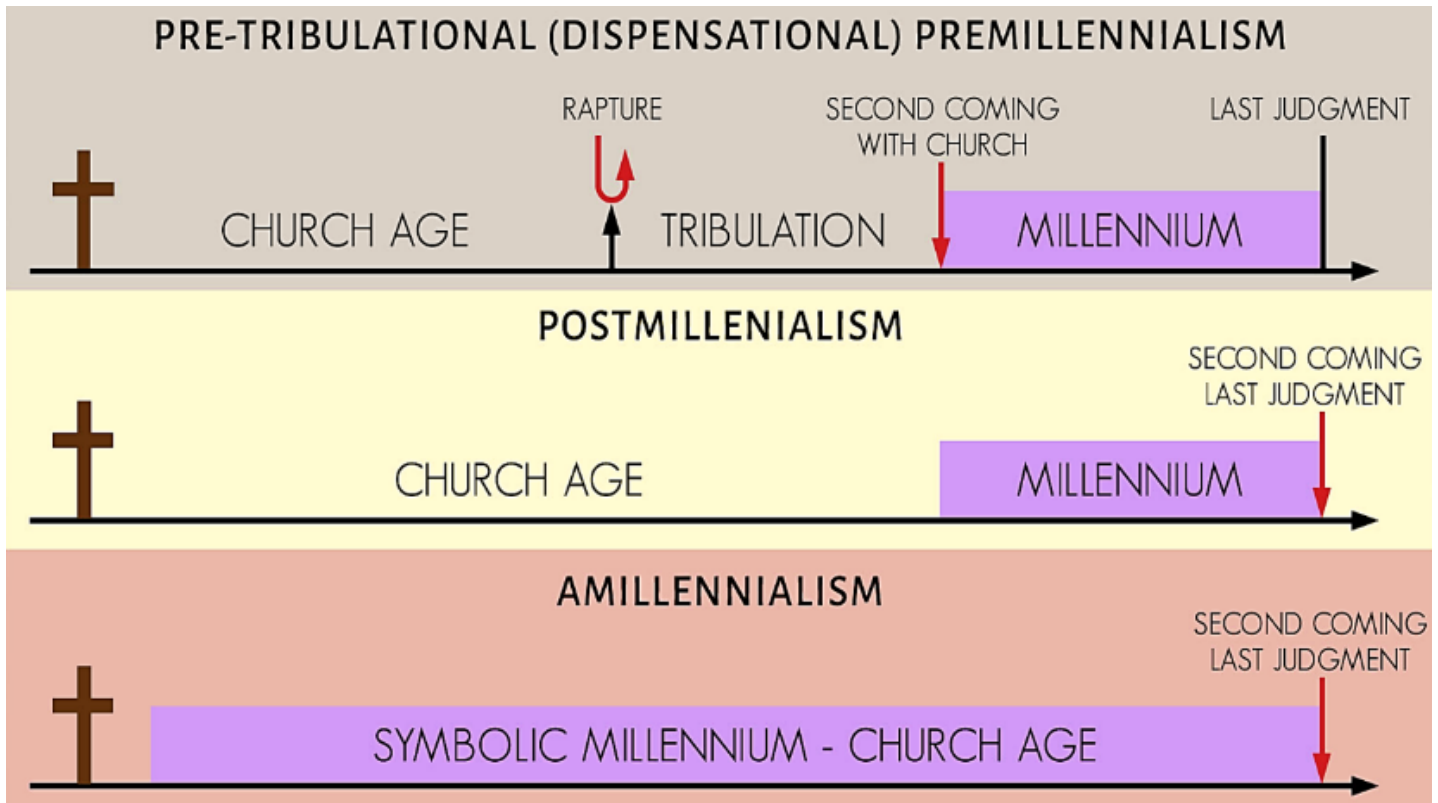
any of the other Gospels, or the Book of Acts, or the Book of Revelation for that matter.

The other 3 times Matthew uses the word, it comes from the lips of Jesus as, “The coming of the Son of Man.” We remember that the “Son of Man” is a title for the Messiah.

In the Epistles, we find the word παρουσία, another 20 times, some are unrelated to Jesus, but of the dozen, or so, that are, every one of them refers to Jesus’ Second Coming at the End of the Age.

In similar fashion the phrase “End of the Age,” in the Bible signifies a specific Theological event. Going back to the Old Testament and throughout the New, it means the end of this world, Final Judgment upon evil, and eternal life with God for those who are His.

What is the 7-year Tribulation? Where does the Rapture fit? What is the Millennial Reign?



The two most common schemes in Christianity are Dispensational Premillennialism and Covenantal Amillennialism. There are all sorts of other permutations - it's nearly endless, but these two general categories fit the majority.

The first was really the brainchild of Darby in the mid-1800's. Gaining in popularity in early 1900's America, it generally includes a Rapture of all Christians before the 7-year long Tribulation begins. That is 7 actual, literal, years of Tribulation, broken into two 3 ½ year-long bits, the second of which is called the Great Tribulation. That is then followed by the Return of Christ with His army and with all the previously

Raptured Christians. They defeat evil and establish a literal Kingdom with Jesus as King and Christians administering the Kingdom as princes and princesses... essentially. The Kingdom will last a literal 1,000 years here on earth (hence the name Millennium - Latin for 1,000 years). After the 1,000-year reign of Jesus. He will give evil another chance, but it is short-lived, as Jesus crushes the rebellion and then the Final White Throne Judgment. That is followed by an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire for the Judged, and an eternal bliss in Heaven for the rest of us.

I've got to tell you that Biblically, there are so many significant problems with this super-popular scheme, that few scholars fully embrace it. While it is wildly popular and wholeheartedly accepted by millions of Christians, the academically minded are still working out the bugs. What has been going on for several decades now is a revamping - a modifying - a tweaking - of the scheme to fix the issues.

One of the best-known pastors in this camp is John MacArthur. He has the radio show, "Grace to You," pastors Grace Community Church in California, and has written a ton of books, including the MacArthur Study Bible.

He has called himself a “Leaky Dispensationalist.” He’s not the only one. Practically all Dispensationalist academics have developed convoluted, complicated ways to make the scheme better fit the Scripture.

It makes sense to me when you consider the source. The scheme was devised by a man in the mid 1800’s, who had no formal Theological training, rejected the church and the clergy, formed his own denomination, but kept shunning those in it because they didn’t fully agree with him on every point of his new doctrine.

My point is not that it’s impossible that he came up with something not seen before, but that one man working on so many tasks, building a new denomination, answering critics, pastoring people, and doing active missionary work, not to mention, developing a whole new doctrine... Didn’t have the time and resources to align his ideas with all of the Bible. There are problems and people have been trying to work out those problems for a long time. That’s why today, there are several iterations, or types, of Dispensationalism. Yet, for the common Christian in the street, so to speak, it is dogmatically held.

On the other hand, we have Covenantal Amillennialism as another extremely well accepted way to understand the end. I have categorized it as Covenantal because that's the majority, but others, not claiming that title are also Amillennialists.

Amillennialists believe that they are already living in both the Tribulation and the Millennium. A war rages between sin and Grace. The forces of evil and God's wrath upon the world due to sin devastate what could be, but on the other hand, Christ defeated sin, death and the grave and so the Gospel is proclaimed, and people are Saved. They think the Tribulation will progressively get worse until Christ returns with His army. As He is Coming down, the Christians will be Raptured up to join Him and watch Him defeat evil. Then the Judgment. Those judged to an eternity alone and the rest in God's presence forever. Amillennial means, no Millennium. It's not accurate; they believe in a Millennium; they just believe that we're already in it, and that Christ reigns through us now... Imperfectly, because we're also in the Tribulation. The Rapture, Christ's Second Coming, and the End of the Age with its Final Judgment, all happen at the same time.

The basic difference is that Amillennialism sees much of the prophetic as symbolic, especially when it comes to apocalyptic prophecy. For example, a Dispensationalist interprets the Book of Revelation literally and linearly... One event leading to the next event and then the one after that in linear time progression and that each thing is to be taken as something to be literally, physically, fulfilled in its time. It is called literalism. Conversely, Covenantal Theology takes Revelation as symbolic and circular... The groupings of Sevens, like the 7 Bowls, 7 Trumpets, 7 Seals, etc., symbolically paint a metaphorical picture of a single end event. Each grouping of Seven is simultaneous with the others, but each one in describing the event expands and intensifies the Message. The details within each are figurative, just as Jesus saying, "Not one stone here will be left upon another." Not all agree. Those who insist on literalism, say that Jesus only meant the Temple stones. Of course, they have to assume that somehow in the rubble of destruction no stone was still resting on another stone.

Last week I used a different example. Literalism requires far more imagination than allowing certain things to be figurative. Literalism takes a lot of work.

I must tell you honestly, that Dispensational thinking is how modern Americans do things. It is reflected in our culture and our attitudes and even in our language. I've pointed out many times that English is a very analytical and relatively uninflected language, whereas Hebrew and Greek are highly synthetic and extremely inflected. Language reflects the culture. The Jewish people of Jesus' day painted pictures with their words and evoked emotion with their stories. The ancient genre of apocalypse with its prophetic apocalyptic language is intended to be evocative rather than purely descriptive or literal. But modern westerners are more about soundbites and actual pictures - especially moving pictures in living color. It's the difference in listening to a radio broadcast of a game in the 1940's and watching a television broadcast in the 2020's... Listen to the play-by-play announcer in both and see who paints a picture. It's why we don't do as well listening to big sections of Scripture read aloud.

Not just the language, but the entire method of argumentation is vastly different. We are building block people. Foundational people where one idea must build upon another and another all the way down to bedrock. Lawyers are especially wired this way. A

lawyer friend of mine hated the Apostle Paul's Epistles, especially the Book of Romans, because Paul was scatterbrained. One topic and then another and back to the first and then a different point and then a rabbit trail and back to the first again. When I showed him how Greek rhetoric and argument works - how it is so different from our method - he was able to see Paul in a new light. Paul, as I've tried to show repeatedly, was brilliant and his argument is wonderful, once you understand that he used first century Greek logic, not 21st century American logic.

The rhetoric, logic, and argumentation of the first century favors the Amillennialist view, while Premillennialism resonates with modern Americans.

Another key difference between Dispensationalism and Covenantal Theology is the Jews. Dispensationalists believe that the Rapture closes the Church Age and that during the literal 7-year Tribulation, God gets back to dealing with the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. This is why Evangelical/Fundamentalist Christians, who are almost entirely Dispensational, care so much about modern Israel.

Covenantal Theology has no special place for the Jews. For a Jew to be right with God they need to accept Jesus just like anyone else because Jesus ushered in the New Covenant. It applies to everyone, Jew, or Gentile. They point out that the modern nation of Israel is one of the least religious, secular nations on earth. The citizens are generally either atheists, non-religious, or they go entirely the other way and are so legalistic they would make a Pharisee green with envy.

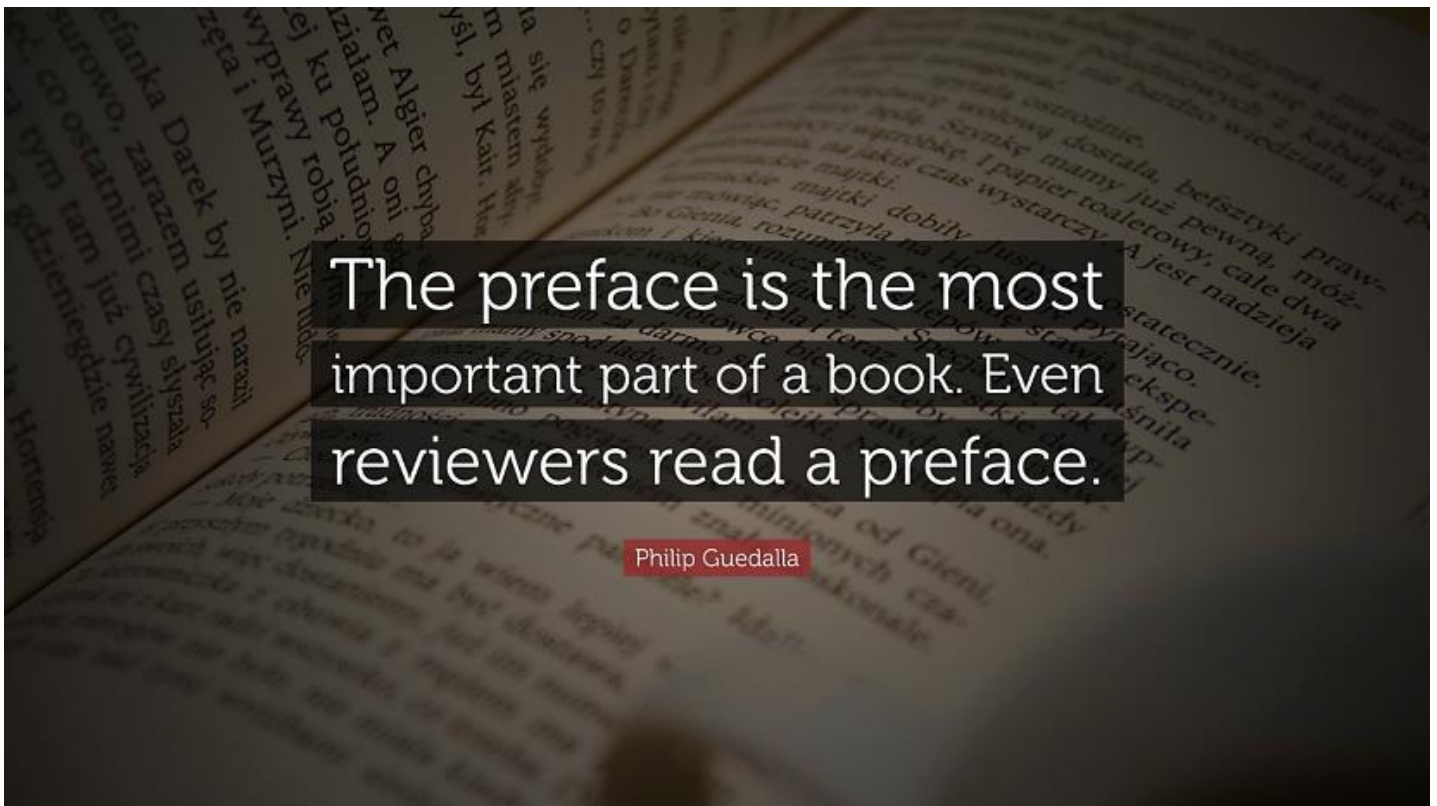
Like I said last week, we will follow the Bible and not be corralled into man-made categories. It's important to understand where ideas come from and what they mean, and that's why I bring it up.

Here in Matthew, there is no question that the Coming of Jesus and the End of the Age with Final Judgment happen at the same time. Jesus returns to earth and defeats evil. That can still leave room for the possibility of a Pretribulation Rapture and literal 1,000-year reign, but it sure complicates the straightforward meaning.

So, two questions. When will the destruction come and what will be the sign of Your return at the end? We can surmise that they thought all of that would happen at the same time, but we can't know that for sure. What

we do know is that Jesus's response is best seen as two separate things... The destruction of the Temple and then separate from that, His Return, and the End of the Age.

Not all agree with what I just concluded... Let's keep going and see if the two questions are really two separate issues in Jesus' response.



We saw before that in verses 4-8 Jesus prefaced His answer to their questions. By doing that, He was saying, first and foremost, there is going to come a situation where you will be bombarded with false information and claims. If you're not hyper careful, you

will be misled. It blows me away, that Jesus starts with this and for 2,000 years most of Christendom has been misled concerning these things.

I'm certain that most of you hold some pretty strong opinions about this subject matter and my question to you is why? I have heard Christians in my lifetime talk about the War in Vietnam as the beginning of the Tribulation and Richard Nixon as the Antichrist. Every Pope and every President of the United States has been declared the Antichrist. Every war has been declared the beginning of the End.

Now it's Corona Virus, or Climate Change, and on and on, we could go. Stop! Jesus was telling us to stop... Focus on Him, focus on His church, focus on the spread of the Gospel in word and in deed.

In that opening gambit, Jesus said, "Keep watch!" and "Be careful," but He also said, "Don't be alarmed." We need to be wise so as not to be led astray as just another idiot in the mob, but we must also not fear, because in Christ there is nothing to fear. What drives out fear?

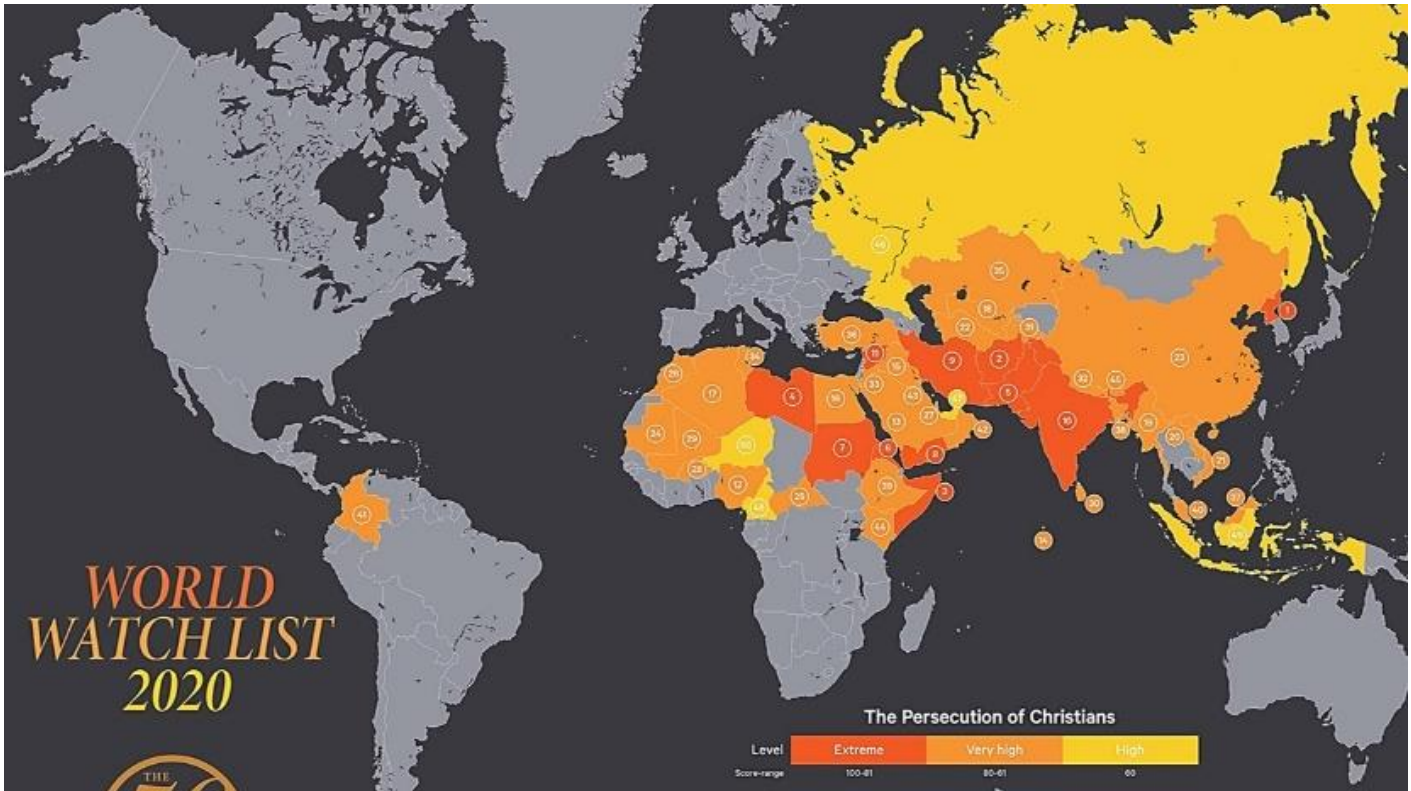


Only love. Bluster and bravado hide it, training and practice mitigate it, but only love destroys it. Take a note of what God has to say in I Thessalonians 3:12&13, 12and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus... Or what God tells us in I John 2:28&29, 28Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 29If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Practicing righteousness is abiding in His Righteousness. Be found entirely in Jesus. Rely on His completed work, not your own. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Embrace the Love of the Father for you and return it to Him, to the church, and to the Lost.

That's what Christianity is my friends. We want to make it something different, but the essence of Christianity is Agapê Love. It can only come from God and so when it is displayed through us it proves that we are in Him. Love my friends, Love.

It's difficult to do because. there's been trouble, we're in trouble now, and there will be trouble in the future, but we have a mission. It is literally a mission of Love. I know that I don't have that within me and so I pray that Christ's love would emanate from me and when it does, my faith is strengthened, and I can face the day, no matter what it holds.



And what does it hold? Matthew 24:9-12, 9“Then people will hand you over to be treated badly and killed. All nations will hate you because of me. 10At that time, many will turn away from their faith. They will hate each other. They will hand each other over to their enemies. 11Many false prophets will appear. They will fool many people. 12Because evil will grow, most people’s love will grow cold.

Verses 4-8 could certainly apply to the entire sweep of time. Here we like to think that Jesus was only talking about the events leading up to the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish nation and then perhaps in the Tribulation after we’re all safely Raptured... Think about it, pray about it, see if your old ideas hold up.

Whatever the future holds for us, we know life has been brutal for many others - not because life is brutal, but because they refused to disavow Christ.

Verse 9, not only treated badly, but betrayed... Notice that... You will be “Handed over.” You will be “Hated” by everyone because of your faith in Jesus. Not because of your insistence on a Pretribulational Rapture, not because of your refusal to wear a mask, not because of your love for Trump, but because you are faithful to the Lord. Far better to suffer for Him, than for your opinions.



1. I can get better preaching from a podcast.
2. I can worship on my own.
3. I can study the Bible on my own.
4. I have Christian friends that are my “church.”
5. I have to work on Sundays.
6. I have family obligations on the weekends.
7. I feel like church is boring.
8. I don’t feel like there is a place for my child or teenager.
9. I don’t feel like going to church makes a difference in my life.
10. I don’t know of any “good” churches near me.
11. I’m not sure I believe the same things anymore.
12. I’m offended by the church’s position on sexuality.
13. I’ve been hurt by church members.
14. I don’t trust church leadership.
15. I don’t feel like there is a place for me to lead.

Verse 10 many people will leave the church. Scott, that isn't the same as leaving the Faith, Perhaps, but please hear me, local church participation is a litmus test, or a symptom of being in the Faith. People who shun church participation almost always fall further away from Jesus. Why do they leave? They get their tender feelings hurt. The return fire, lash out, defend themselves and the war is on. How long before hate enters in? How long before one or both parties leave the church? How long before they do unthinkable, unspeakable things, to each other given the opportunity?



Verse 11, people will follow the entertainers. Bread and circus' my friends.



Verse 12, because of the evil in the church... Get that. Because of the evil in the church of disunity and disfellowship and hatred and vicious betrayal, "Most people's love will grow cold." The love here is Agapê. Obviously, the affection and brotherly love is long gone, but now the choice to love others because Christ commanded it is gone. The word in Greek does mean to cool, but in the normal usage it applies to a fire and means to extinguish the flame entirely. A cold fire is not a weak fire, it is a dead fire. The context favors that understanding.



Matthew 24:13, 13But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. Standing firm to the end, doesn't mean being dogmatic or selfish or childish, it means putting on your big boy pants and doing what God has commanded, Love Him, love your fellow Christians and Love the Lost enough to tell them why they hate you.

Worry about having more of God's Love emanate from you and everything else will take care of itself.