The Gospel Will Conquer All Its Enemies

Do you worry about the demise of Christianity in our country? While it is true that most Americans still claim to be Christians, the facts say differently. For example, in a Barna survey exploring how many adults have a Biblical worldview, they discovered that only 9% do.

For the purposes of the survey, a "biblical worldview" was defined as believing that absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches; Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today. In the research, anyone who held all those beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview.

The definition given above is not only a concise description of historic Christian doctrine, it also reflects the values and thinking of those who are genuine followers of Jesus Christ. This likely explains why there is such a sharp cultural and political divide in our country. Half of our populations has abandoned the Judeo-Christian beliefs on which this nation was founded, while half are still trying to hold on to some form of it. What is especially alarming are the answers given when the Barna group interviewed people who call themselves as “born again Christians.” Only 19% have a Biblical outlook on life, as defined above.

So, we worry that the gospel has lost its power to penetrate our post-Christian culture and maybe the world beyond us. But we need not worry. Wherever the Gospel is preached (not a watered-down version found in many “seeker-friendly” churches), some reject it because its demands are so high. “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23) While others open their eyes to the lies of the world and the truth of Jesus. “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:16-17) See our last post where hundreds of Nicaraguans are receiving new life by believing in Christ.

In this study, we see the power of the Gospel illustrated in five messages from Heaven to the Apostle John. The first is the preaching of the Gospel exposing the lies of the Antichrist.

A. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

Do you remember the promise of Jesus in Matthew 24:14? He said, “This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come.” It is clear that this goal has not yet been achieved. The Church has sent missionaries far and wide, but not every people group has been reached yet. Some have interpreted this to mean that the Rapture of the Church cannot take place until everyone has heard about Christ. But I take a different position. For “the end” to which Jesus referred was not the Rapture, but
the Tribulation. Jesus was promising that the Tribulation would not end and the Kingdom would not come until every nation on earth has a chance to hear the truth and believe.

How will this task be achieved? Revelation 14:6 explains. Not only will the 144,000 canvas the world telling others about Christ, but it adds, “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language, and people.” This is an amazing, one-of-a-kind event.

Prophecy teacher, Hal Lindsey, comments, “For centuries, angels have wanted to get in on the act of world evangelization. Peter tells us that the angels are intensely interested in the whole story of redemption (1 Peter 1:12). They have been itching to preach the Gospel—but God has given that privilege to us. The angels would love to push us to one side and really get the job done right…Now at last the angels will have their chance!”

What will be the content of the angel’s message? Only a portion is revealed, but what is revealed is fascinating. It is a call back to the basics. The Antichrist has so confused the minds of those on earth, that it is necessary for him to repeat the spiritual A, B, C’s—that God, not the Beast, is the Creator, that He alone is worthy of our worship, and judgment is soon coming to those who refuse to do so. He says in verse 7, “Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water”—the very target of His judgment thus far in the Tribulation.

By the way, does mankind need this message today? More than any other time in history. Man’s heart has become so ungrateful and his mind has become so darkened that he no longer even recognizes the existence of a Creator. Through the clear propaganda of many in the science community, Darwin’s evolutionary theory is now considered “accepted fact.” One cannot visit a museum or listen to a documentary on PBS without hearing that the “universe is billions and billions of years old.” Consequently, if all we are is the result of chance plus time, then anything goes, doesn’t it? Abortion. Same-sex marriage. Euthanasia of the terminally ill. Without a belief in a Creator, there are no absolutes to hold us accountable.

But if you think this pattern is widespread today, wait until the Tribulation. Crafty beyond belief, the Beast will include in his system New Age teachings promising man a radical leap forward in our evolution. Like the Serpent of old, he will urge us, “Ignore the voice of God and bite into this lie, and you will be like God.” People’s minds will be so confused it will take an angel from heaven to correct their atheistic thinking. How gracious of God to send him.

B. THE FALL OF BABYLON

Verse 8 continues, “A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’”
Here we find the reason for the success of Antichrist’s brain-washing efforts. It is Babylon the Great. To what does this refer? In chapter 17 and 18, we will find that this is a reference to both the false religious system and the economic structure that dominates the world during the Tribulation. There we will try to identify where this city is located. But here we rejoice with Heaven at the crushing of these two entities which form the basis of Antichrist’s Kingdom. Impressed with her great wealth and military might, this “great city” will assume that she is above judgment. But such is not the case! In one day God will bring her down.

Revelation 18:8 gives the details: “Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry, ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom come has come.’”

C. THE PUNISHMENT OF ANTICHRIST’S FOLLOWERS

Verse 9: “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’”

Today both cult leaders and liberal theologians question the idea of eternal punishment. “After all,” they say, “how could a loving God send anyone to hell?” But this passage leaves no doubt about it. John says, “The smoke of their torment rises forever and ever.” Those are the very same words used in Revelation 4:10 to describe the eternity of God. This means that the Jehovah Witness’ idea of annihilation of the wicked has no basis in Scripture. The wicked will not merely be “zapped out of existence.” They will continue to suffer as long as God is God, having no rest day or night forever.

A pastor writes, “When I was a teenager I used to say to the gals I went with: ‘I’m going live fast, die young, and leave a good-looking corpse!’ Little did I know what hell was about! My buddies used to say, ‘I want to go to hell. All my pals will be there and we’ll play poker forever.’ I used to laugh with them until someone asked me, ‘Did you ever see anyone play poker in a blast furnace.’”

And yet, even here notice the evidence of God’s grace. The Greek test of verse 9 literally says, “If anyone continues to worship the beast and his image. This means that even after being deceived by Antichrist, there is still a chance to repent and turn to Jesus. Why? Because God
isn’t eager to send anyone to hell. Instead, 2 Peter 3:9 assures us, He is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

Hell is never pleasant to talk about. But we must be true to Scripture, and the Bible is clear. There is a Heaven to gain and a hell to shun. In fact, no one ever talked more about hell than Jesus, whose Spirit is urging us even now to turn from our sins and be saved.

D. THE REWARDING OF BELIEVERS

In contrast to verse 11, which says there is no rest for the wicked, verse 13 says there is eternal joy for those who love Jesus. John goes on, “Then I heard a voice from heaven says, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’”

That is comforting for two reasons. First, it reminds us that our suffering will not last forever. No matter what we endure in this life—illness, heartache, fatigue—the moment we leave this place all sorrow will immediately end. Absent from the body will be at home with the Lord. Second, John says, our “works follow” us. Why does that matter? It means that unlike our human bosses who often fail to take notice of or forget our faithful service, God never will. Jesus promised that even ‘a cup of cold water’ given in His name will receive a reward.

E. THE HARVESTING OF THE EARTH

In Revelation 14:14-20, John pictures the punishment of the beast and his followers in terms of a harvest. Actually, there are two harvests seen here, each one intended to portray something about the final judgment of the earth.

The first harvest is a harvest of grains. Verse 14 says, “I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one ‘like a son of man’ with a crown of gold on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.’ Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to Him who was sitting on the cloud, ‘Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ So He who was seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.”

This first harvest anticipates the separation of believers and unbelievers at the end of the age. Right now God allows saints and sinners to grow up side by side within the same home or church, so that it is sometimes difficult to tell the two apart, since many sinners know all the right religious terminology. I have served in churches where such people were present. As long as we stressed love and fellowship, they were “with us.” But the moment we called for personal repentance and commitment, they doused our zeal with opposition or indifference. Jesus spoke of this danger in the parable of the wheat and the tares. He said the enemy would sow tares (weeds) to hinder the growth of the good grain. But He also warned that nothing should be done about it until the harvest, lest we “uproot the wheat with tares.”
Well, the harvest has almost arrived. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is about to separate the wheat from the weeds. He Himself will not do the dividing. Matthew 13:41 says He will send His angels to do the reaping, gathering the wicked for judgment and leaving the righteous to enter the Kingdom of God and repopulate the earth that has been destroyed.

The second harvest is a harvest of grapes. Verse 17 continues, “Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.’ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

This is a preview of Christ’s final judgment at the battle Armageddon. There Revelation 19:15 says He will “tread the winepress of the fierce wrath of God.” Two other facts are worth emphasizing here. One is the place of judgment. Where will this great bloodbath take place? “Outside the city,” indicating that Jerusalem will be ground zero for God’s final blast of judgment. Speaking of the same event, Zechariah 14:2-3 says that the Lord “will gather all nations against Jerusalem” and then “the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle.”

The second fact to notice is the extent of judgment. Verse 20 says the blood of this winepress will rise “as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.” How far is that? If you look in the margin of your Bible, you may find the answer. My Bible says, “180 miles!” It is grizzly to think about, but the whole valley of Armageddon down to the Gulf of Aqabah will be filled with the blood and bodies of those who have followed Antichrist and rejected Jesus the Savior. It will be a terrible time of judgment, but what follows will be worth it. For it is not until these enemies are finally dealt with that God’s Kingdom can come and His will can be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

An old television commercial asked the question, “How do you spell relief?” Their purpose was to see a certain brand of antacid guaranteed to stop the pain of heartburn.

A similar question could be posed as we come to the end of this study. Having endured the heartache of life’s trials, we may wonder, “How and when will I ever find relief?” John’s visions of the future remind us that there is only one lasting solution to life’s troubles. We need Christ! Only when Jesus comes will there be lasting peace and rest. But that day is coming soon. So, hold on! When life’s trials begin to make you sad or mad, think back to these glimpses of the future and let them give you hope. For Christ is coming soon to give you an everlasting vacation from all the sorrow, stress, and suffering that you are currently enduring.