Today we’re continuing our series on the primary doctrines of our faith. If you’ve been with us over the Summer, we’ve looked at the doctrines of God, Jesus, the H.S., the Bible, Man/sin, and salvation. Today, as you’ve likely guessed, we’re going to look at the doctrine of Eschatology or the doctrine of last things.

Eschatology is the one doctrine that seems to fascinate us the most – yet it’s easily the most confounding of the primary doctrines of the church. We all want to know when the end is coming and how.

It reminds me of a young pastor who was preaching his 1st sermon at his new church. He really wanted to wow the congregation, so he decided to preach on the 2nd coming of Christ. As he began his message, quoting from Rev. 22, he ran to the edge of the stage and said, “Behold, I come quickly!” Unfortunately for him, he lost his train of thought and didn’t know what to say next; so, he backed up and ran forward a 2nd time exclaiming – “Behold, I come quickly!” Still nothing. On the 3rd attempt to jog his memory, as he ran to the edge of the stage and shouted, “Behold, I come quickly!” – only he tripped over a cord and fell into the lap of a senior deacon sitting on the front pew. Embarrassed and a bit shaken, the young pastor apologized to the older man who replied, “Don’t worry son, you warned me 3 times you were coming.”

I An OVERVIEW of Last Things

This AM, I want to give you a simple overview of the doctrine of eschatology to give you a working understanding. Let’s review the BFM and a passage from Acts 1.

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

“They gathered around Him and asked, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It’s not for you to know the times/dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the H.S. comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea/Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when two men dressed in white suddenly stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” 1:6-8

A The RETURN of Christ

Behold, He is coming w/ clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Rev. 1:7

Christ is returning – is a foundational truth to our faith and should serve as a key motivator in how we live each day. His return will be physical/visible cracking the Eastern sky. This is called His parousia, His return, His appearing, His coming.
But as Acts 1 tells us – no one know the date/time of the Lord’s return; we only know He promised He was coming. I say this b/c much like trying to figure out creation – no one really knows how it’ll happen, even though there’s a great deal of information in the Bible to piece together to give us hints. Yet if you look closer, the focus isn’t on His return, but on our charge until He returns – we’re commanded to be vigilantly on mission. Notice Acts 1:7-8. No one knows when – but until then, we’re to live under the leading of the H.S. going into all the world to testify of God’s love/grace.

B The RESURRECTION

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. John 5:28-29

At some point in time in the future, there will be a resurrection of the living and the dead. This resurrection is predicated on the resurrection of Jesus.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came thru a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also thru a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 1 Cor. 15:20-22

An obvious question regarding the resurrection has to do w/ our bodies. Not much is known w/ certainty about the resurrected body, but most scholars believe it’ll be similar to the resurrected body of Jesus. What we do know is found in 1 Corinthians 15.

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? W/ what kind of body will they come?” So will it be w/ the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. 1 Cr. 15:35, 42-44

What we know is we will have some sort of physical body, but one that is distinct and more glorious than this current carcass we walk around in. These bodies will be set free from the curse of sin/death and will be imperishable.

C The JUDGMENTS

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels w/ Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Mt.25:31f

At the time of Christ’s return, after the resurrection of the living and the dead, the Lord will judge all people for their beliefs/deeds. Believers will go before God at the Bema Seat to be judged for their faithful service to God on this earth while the unbeliever will stand before God at the Great White Throne judgment.
It is generally believed that judgment of the unbeliever includes degrees of punishment while judgment of the believer includes degrees of reward. Regardless, it is to be affirmed that there’s no wrath or condemnation associated w/ the judgment of believers.

D The **MILLENIUMS**

The doctrine of the millennium is birthed primarily from Revelation 20:1-7. There are basically (3) positions which have developed in understanding this period, although in the case of pre-millennialism, there are (2) subsets of comprehension.

I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for 1,000 years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the 1,000 years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded b/c of their testimony about Jesus and b/c of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned w/ Christ 1,000 years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1,000 years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign w/ him for 1,000 years. When the 1,000 years are over, Satan will be released from his prison... Rev. 20:1-7

1 **A-Millennialism**

Amillennialism believes there will not be an actual 1,000 yr. reign of Christ b/c they view that the current Church age is the millennium. This view holds that the reign of Christ began w/ the binding of Satan at Christ’s death/resurrection and that Jesus will continue to reign in heaven at God’s right hand until His return. At that time, Satan will be released for a final time of apostasy – leading to a general resurrection and final judgment which will then usher in the eternal state.

2 **Post-Millennialism**

Post-millennialism is the belief that Christ will return after Christians have established a peaceful kingdom on this earth for some 1,000 yrs. They see the world as becoming a better place b/c it has be Christianized – this view was fairly widely held in the early 1900’s but has suffered followship after all of the wars and social degradation of the last century. Ultimately though, God will allow a final apostasy where He will come and decisively overthrow sin/Satan and usher in a time of resurrection, judgment and eternity.

3 **Pre-Millennialism**

Pre-millennialism holds that the 1,000 yr. reign of Christ is literal and that it will follow the tribulation and 2nd coming of Christ. This return will usher in the millennial age in which Satan is bound from deceiving the nations and God’s Kingdom fully manifested. At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released from bondage and there will be a large-scale revolt against God’s plan on the earth. Christ will then finally and decisively destroy death and will consign Satan/His legions to the final place of torment. It’s at this time the new heavens/earth will appear and the faithful will enter into the eternal state.

E The **TRIBULATION**
The tribulation is a 7 yr. period when God’s wrath will be poured out on the earth in a series of Divine judgments in response to the Satan’s advancement and the great apostasy. A few primary texts for the tribulation is Daniel 9 and the book of Revelation.

F The **RAPTURE**

The Rapture is the time when the church will meet the Lord upon His return. The word *rapture* is derived from the Latin *rapio* meaning to *carry away, seize, snatch*. The idea of the rapture is 1 Thes. 4:15-17.

*According to the word of the Lord, we tell you that we who are still alive at the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven, w/ a loud command, w/ the voice of the archangel and trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then, we who are still alive and will be caught up together w/ them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be w/ the Lord forever.*

Regarding the rapture, there are (4) primary views:

1 Pre-Tribulation – before
2 Mid-Tribulation – after the AD
3 Pre-Wrath Tribulation – 3/4
4 Post-Tribulation – End

So, there you go! A Reader’s Digest version of the doctrine of eschatology. And what is my position? Well… after all my studies/prayerful consideration, I fall into the Pre-Tribulation/Pre-Millennium camp.

I often joke that I’m a Pan-trib/Pan-Millennialist – that is… *it’s all going to pan out in the end* – and that’s b/c I think the better question isn’t how is it all going to end, but when Jesus comes – Will I be ready? Will I be living for Him? This is the goal of eschatology – to have each of us living expectantly for His return.

II The **OBJECTIVE** of Last Things

Most of us profess to believe Jesus will someday return, yet we’re not actually expecting it to be any day soon. In fact, far too many of us have lost our sense of expectancy; we’ve lost the anticipation which should characterize our faith and motivate our sense of mission. Yet our calling is to live each moment in the hope of Jesus’ return – living for the eternal.

A Live in View of **ETERNITY**

*Be self-controlled and alert, knowing the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.* 1 Thes. 5:8

This means we can’t go on living like our lost neighbors. We can’t live as though this life is all there is. We must live in view of eternity – led by the H.S. instead of by the desires of the flesh.
Life is the vestibule to eternity. It is the foyer to forever, what we do here, whether we are truly followers of Christ or merely those who say Lord, Lord, but fail to do the will of the Father, all of that will be shown here on this earth. C.S. Lewis

B   Make **TODAY** Count

*In everything you do, in word/deed, do it for the glory of God.* Colossians 3:17

Quite simply – make every day count for the Kingdom. Let everyday be an opportunity to let your light shine and be used for the eternal. No matter you’re doing, live each moment of each day to bring glory to God.

C   Live **READY** for Christ’s Return

Vance Havner told of a lady waiting at a train station for her fiancé who was coming to join her for their wedding. She stood in the station looking, longing, and waiting – eager w/ anticipation. Also there was an old stationmaster who was waiting for the train too, but for a different reason. He had the schedule, and it was his job. He knew all the facts about the train, but he wasn’t expecting the train the same way the bride-to-be was.

We should all be waiting/watching for Christ’s return like this bride-to-be – **b/c we’re the bride-to-be**. May God give us the spirit of the bride rather than the spirit of the stationmaster.
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Pastor Joey Rodgers