

When the End Begins

Today we are going to begin our journey through the deep and interesting book of Revelation and it is my hope that this journey will be a help and a blessing.

Billy Graham was in Silicon Valley back in 1998 speaking on the connection between technology and faith. He tells that he was on a plane flying east and the mayor of Charlotte NC at the time, John Belk, was on the plane with him. There was another man who was quite drunk on the flight and he was being very obnoxious and crude toward the female flight attendant and wouldn't stop. Finally it became too much and Mayor John Belk said to the drunk man. Do you know who is sitting there? "No who?" This is Billy Graham the great evangelist. "You don't say," And he turned to Billy Graham held out his hand and said, "Put'er there, your sermons have certainly helped me." [And then Billy Graham said, "I'm certain that's true with thousands of people."]

Well, I hope that you will be more helped than that man on the airplane.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. 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. (Rev 1:1-3 NASB)

When I look back over my life since high school I am amazed at how things have changed in the last 30 years. Science, discovery, development and especially technology is evolving exponentially.

[I recently heard Kevin Kelly in a lecture give the definition for technology. "Technology is anything that was invented after you were born." Another definition was "Technology is anything that doesn't quite work yet."]

To understand what I mean when I say things are evolving exponentially I want to refer you back to a question you were asked in grammar school. "Would you rather be given a million dollars or a penny and the amount of money doubled for 30 days?" The speed with which things are coming at us seems to be doubling every year. Our mind is taking us faster and further than our morals are able to keep up with—and once these things are invented (here) it is impossible to reverse them. We can't un-invent the TV, internet, genetic engineering, DNA testing etc...

To better illustrate how fast things are changing consider for a moment the size of the Pacific Ocean—64 million square miles with an average depth of 14,000 feet. You could put all the continents of the earth in it and still have room for another Asia.

Now if you drained the Pacific Ocean and then begin refilling it with just one drop and then doubling the amount each time, in just 80 times you would refill the entire Pacific.

Of those 80 times on the 70th time the ocean would only be 1/10th percent filled; on the 79th time it would only be half filled. On the 80th time it would be full and the 81st time you would have two Pacific oceans.

Such is the case in the advancement of civilization. If we were making a graph of the technological advancement from the beginning of time till now Year Zero to Year 1975 would be relatively flat. But from 1975 to 2011 the line would be almost completely vertical. One scientist said that in the next 100 years we will have progressed as much as we have since the beginning of time.

We are living in a time that is quickly coming to a climax. In Daniel 12:4 Michael the Arch-angel described these days this way: **"...many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase."** (Dan 12:4)

Paul wrote in 2nd Timothy: **¹² Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.** (2Tim. 3:12-13 NASB)

As society and civilization advances so does sin. Society is constantly in a state of fluctuation...everything seems to be very fluid. I don't think that I am stretching the reality much when I say that very few things are certain anymore.

When earthly things are unstable and uncertain one thing remains constant—"Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday, and forever." Allow me to read you these hopeful words from the prophet Isaiah:

⁹ *"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isaiah 46:9-10 NASB)*

Many people scoff and mock at those of us who have faith asking. Why do we even need God? Well, here is the answer. We need God because He is the only certain, stable, steadfast, and reliable thing there is.

- When everything else wears out and breaks....God doesn't
- When the promises of even the most trusted man fails...God's promises never fail
- When human predictions are found to be on guesses...God's prophecies hold true
- We need God because only God can prophesy...Only God knows the future

Here some things to consider:

- If the calculations of an architect were only as reliable as the weatherman's he would be fired.
- Psychics never win the lottery
- Faith healers die
- Horoscopes are never detailed

*Gunter Sachs was the son of a wealthy "ball-bearing" manufacturer from Germany who incidentally was also a Nazi. Gunter inherited his father's wealth and lived a lavish lifestyle and in the 60's he was married to Bridget Bardot for 3 years. Gunter became obsessed with the idea that there was a link between people's astrological sign and human behavior. He used a great deal of his money to establish the: "Institute for the Empirical and Mathematical Examination of the Possible Truth of Astrology in Relation to Human Behavior". Gunter's institute spent a great deal of time studying the statics held at Switzerland's Official Statistics Office. (This office has recorded the date and hour of every birth in Switzerland since 1875. With this data Gunter Sachs, in 1997(8), published the book, *The Astrology File: Scientific Proof of the Link Between Star Signs and Human Behavior*. It quickly became a big seller and just a quickly lost its popularity after some of its key mathematical calculations were discovered to be off and the readers realized that in*

the final chapter of the book Gunter announced his intention of having nothing more to do with astrology. Which hardly seems to be the action of a man who has just discovered something significant.

Only God knows the future. Does Satan know the future? No. He can predict something and then act to make that prediction become a reality but only God Himself actually knows what tomorrow holds.

I say this to remind you that it is far better to walk through life holding the hand of one who knows. In confusing and uncertain days nothing brings more comfort than being a child of God and knowing that from God's perspective all is planned; in His control; and on His schedule. SATAN HATES THAT!

"Satan hates the book of Genesis because it prophecies of Satan's doom and Satan hates Revelation because in it his doom is realized."

Here is an interesting truth about the bible. There is no devil in the first two and last two chapters of the bible. Before sin—no devil; after sin—no devil.

1. We are not looking for something to happen we are looking for someone to come

The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1)

The word "revelation" is the Greek word 'apokalupsis' and we get our English word apocalypse from it. This word means 'unveiling.'

- This book is the unveiling of King Jesus in all His splendor and glory.
- If your faith doesn't center on Jesus Christ you need a new one.

This is why I have titled this series through Revelation, "For the Glory of God." This book beats with the heartbeat of a proud father, whose son is being revealed—not as a president or prince; but as king of kings and lord of lords.

When Jesus first came, as recorded in Matthew-John, Jesus came veiled in flesh and humanity but when Jesus comes back at the end of time it will be quite different:

- Jesus came riding a white donkey—now he will come on a white stallion
- He paid tribute to Caesar—now all Caesars, rulers, etc... will pay tribute to Him
- Jesus was spit upon and cursed—now every knee will bow and every tongue confess
- He stood before Pilate and was judged—now the whole world will bow before Him and be judged

I know what the world thinks of my Lord but the world is wrong:

- The bible is not a good book that contains some truth—it is the infallible inerrant, inspired Word of God
- This church is not just a religious organization—it is the body of Christ
- We aren't just saying prayers—we are touching and talking to the God of heaven and earth, time and eternity, through the conduit of the sinless, spotless, son of God Jesus Christ—our great high priest.

We aren't looking for something to happen we are looking for someone to come and that someone is the hope of hell-bound hopeless humanity. Jesus the savior of sinners.

2. We are not defeated by the partial temporary failures of today; we are rejoicing in the complete victory of tomorrow

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place (Rev 1:1 NASB)

The Greek word for 'bond-servant' is '*dulos*' which properly translated is slave. To be a slave is to be the property of a master by choice and surrender. The root of '*dulos*' is the word "*dew*" which means "to bind" which shows a permanent unbreakable relationship between owner and servant.ⁱⁱ Because of this relationship all the responsibility for care, protection, and provision belongs to the master.

If we have not surrendered our lives to God then all of our defeats, failures, and mistakes belong to us and we must bear them ourselves but if we've given ourselves to God...then our defeats and failures can't destroy us, God will take care of them....they are nothing more than potholes and curves on the path to final victory.

As God's servant this verse gives you a wonderful and surprising promise. It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will open this book to you so you can see what God is going to do and be comforted...Here God is guaranteeing the conclusion of all things for HIS glory.

Here is how this promise helps us:

- So that we won't get too bogged down in the details of the moment and miss out on the glory at the end.
- To realize that you belong to God so even in the darkest moments—you can remember to glorify God with your body, soul, and spirit.

Warning: There are some things in this book that you and I are not going to understand. We do not have insight into the future but this book does give us assurance that the things of the present are the out-workings of God's present purpose to fulfill his future preordained will.

Revelation reminds us that we are not serving some "angst ridden" God who sits in heaven wringing his hands at every sudden unexpected turn of events. God is in absolute control.

Where do we get this idea that Satan knows the future? He doesn't. In fact Satan still thinks he can win this thing.

- Every time Satan trips us up or maneuvers us into a failure
- Every slight defeat or reversal—Satan thinks he is one step closer to overcoming God.

I want to remind you again that Satan is not all knowing or all powerful. We know that, in the end, all things work out for the believer's good even if it doesn't seem so in the present.

Hear me. As God's children we are not defeated by the partial, temporary failures of today—We can read this book and rejoice in the complete victory of tomorrow.

3. We are not just reading the Bible we are also Heeding the bible

³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it... (Rev 1:3 NASB)

When it comes to Revelation and prophecy there are many people who are curious about the future but God wants more from us than just a curious mind—He wants an obedient life.

There has to be more than just education and proclamation of the truth...there must also be application.

Here in verse three God says that we will be blessed—‘happy’—if we do three things: read, hear, and heed the bible. This is the point: The Bible is the only book that has a God-guarantee to bless your life.

With all of our modern advancements of technology we are still haven’t solved the problem of evil.

Vance Havner: *“Civilization is like a chimpanzee with a blow torch in a room full of dynamite.”* With all our technology and discovery it is surprising to you how little has really changed. They say that the internet and all our wireless communication we have brought the world together. Technology has made the world a neighborhood. [We might be a neighborhood, but we are not a brotherhood.]

The 60’s, in America, was marked by a generation of young people asking three questions: Where did I come from? What am I here for? Where am I going? {My answer: We exist for this purpose...}

Nietzsche wrote about something he called the “eternal return.” Eternal return is the idea that our universe and our existence has occurred an infinite number of times in the past, and will continue to occur ad infinitum. In Nietzsche’s theory, time is cyclical rather than linear. (Think Groundhog Day but instead of a repetitious day it is a repetitious life.) Nietzsche concluded in his book ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’ that although we are unaware of all the previous times we lived this life (unlike Groundhog day) we are to live and act as if it was true. [In other words life is going in circles headed nowhere.]

The Word of God gives us an entirely different picture—time is not cyclical it is linear. The Christian knows where he started and where he’s headed. There is a definite destination and that destination is God. The book of Revelation unfolds and unveils what is going to happen in the end.

All of the world’s history is headed to that point where everything will be righted.

- Jesus will be on the throne
- All believers will be with Christ
- Satan, and all those who serve him, will be cast into the lake of fire

Knowing that this is the absolute guaranteed outcome helps us. What do you say to a Christian who is:

- Suffering unbearable, untreatable pain
- Wife/Husband who is being abused by their spouse
- Man holding his child’s hand while they bury their wife and mother

I’ll tell you what you say. You muster up all the love you have in your heart and you put your arms around their shoulder and whisper into their ear: THIS IS NOT GOD’S FINAL PLAN!!

Do you know what God’s final plan is? Turn with me to Rev. 21:4.

4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Rev 21:4 NASB)

That is God's final plan for His children!! As God's children we want to obey God's word because we know we are headed somewhere good.

4. Jesus isn't just coming soon; His return is at hand

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. (Rev 1:3NASB)

This doesn't mean that the time is immediate; it means that the time is imminent. (Doesn't mean that it will happen now; it means that it could happen at any moment.)

- 1 Peter 7:7 "But the end of all things is at hand"
- James 5:8 "The coming of the Lord draws near"
- Philippians 4:5 "Let your moderation be known to all; the Lord is at hand"
- 1 John 3:18 "Little children it is the last time"

Everyone of these writers were saying that Jesus could return at any moment—Jesus may not come for a 100 years but he might come today—we don't know and we are not told—We need to live expecting Jesus at any moment. This is what John is saying. And the increase of sorrow in our world proves it.

It has been said that "When little men cast long shadows, you know the sun is about to set." We live in that day. Today's heroes lack ethics, integrity, morality...and might I add intelligence.

- How else do you explain why Ben Rothlisberger makes millions of dollars a year throwing a pig-skin and our school teachers can't get enough money to purchase copy paper for school work.
- Our children can tell you who Hannah Montana is but who is James Watson and Francis Crick (The scientists who discovered DNA.)
- We know who Charlie Sheen is but who is Steven Pinker? (Probably the most brilliant scholar of the philosophy of language—presently at Harvard.)

Is this the beginning of the end? Have things gone too far? Is there no hope?

Years ago the filmmakers in Hollywood produced a lot of movies portraying cowboys and cowboy singers. One talented cowboy singer/songwriter was a man named Stuart Hamblin. He appeared in a few movies but was much better known for his hard living.

One day God changed all of that and Stuart Hamblin turned his life completely over to God. A young actor named John Wayne noticed a change in Stuart's life and asked him, "Stuart what is your secret?" His answer became a beloved hymn many of us have heard.

It is not secret what God can do; what he's done for others he will do for you
With arms wide open; he'll pardon you; It is no secret what God can do

No matter where you are, or what you have done there is hope for you. The reality of the imminent return of Jesus should not be a point of fear, it should be a place of rejoicing. I'll make a promise to you. If you'll

come to Jesus...no matter what you are going through or what you've done...If you come to Jesus, in the end, everything will work out wonderful for you.

ⁱ http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/billy_graham_on_technology_faith_and_suffering.html

ⁱⁱ Vincent Word Studies