

The Last Days

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[0 : 00] I want tonight to reflect with you on the last things, and I want to portray them as affording us as believers the blessed hope.

Those are referred to often as eschatology by theologians. There is a Greek word for the last things. It might also be referred to as ontomology, the study of the final development and denouement of salvation history.

I want to begin by making two general points. First of all, that we live already in the last days.

We often hear men refer to this fact in a very dramatic way, that they think we are living in the last days. And of course that is true, but not in the sense they intend.

The last days began with the first advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are told that he came in the fullness of the times.

[1 : 17] We are told that God has in these last days spoken to us by a son. We are told by the Apostle John, little children, it is the last time.

The phrase to a large extent reflects an Old Testament orientation. The Old Testament is the age of anticipation and expectation.

And ours is the age of fulfillment. And so, in between the first and second advent, we are living in the last days.

We are those upon whom the end of the ages has come. And those last days bear certain important characteristics.

This is the age of an enthroned Messiah, with Christ as the whole world in his hands. It is the age of the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

[2 : 22] It is the age of Gospel Universalism. It is the age of miracles, of the mighty acts of our recent Saviour.

And it is, maybe above all, the age of worldwide mission. It is remarkable how very often in the New Testament, the concept of the last days and of our resources is linked specifically to the obligation to evangelize the whole world.

The Lord says, All the authority is mine. You go and be disciples of all the nations. The Spirit is poured upon all flesh in the language of every nation under heaven.

Because the commitment of the Church is to be the Lord's witnesses to the very ends of the earth. Satan is bound to receive the Gentiles no more, the nations no more.

And so, it is so important to remind ourselves that as we face the apparently impossible task of mission, and it is apparently impossible, as we face it, we do so in this particular segment of history, in this particular portion of time, called the last days.

[3 : 59] And this time segment is marked by those features, by the binding of Satan, by the sovereignty of Christ, by the outpouring of the Spirit.

And I think that it will really lend a new excitement, a new sense of anticipation to evangelism.

If we are to keep on reminding ourselves that we are engaged in this task in the last days, on with what Hebrews calls the powers of the age to come.

That age has come. It is the last time. We are evangelising at the end of the age with resources proper and peculiar to that great segment of time.

But then, secondly, we also live in hope and anticipation. And there is here a very much tension within the New Testament between the existence that ours is the age of fulfilment, when Christ has come and the King has come, and yet ours is also the age of expectation, anticipation, of hope and of love.

[5 : 26] It is expressed in the paradox that the end has come and yet, not yet. The great promises of God have been fulfilled, they have been realised, and yet, they wait their fulfilment.

It is, at point, a very obvious tension in the New Testament. For example, the Lord announces, the Kingdom of God is at hand.

And the Lord teaches us to pray, Thy Kingdom come. It has come and it is yet to come. So there is both an insistence that the last days have come and that we live in expectation of those last days.

Now, we must be very careful as we simply turn off those last things as if they were simply some kind of appendix to Christianity.

they really are integral to Christianity because only in the last days is our salvation completed and finalised.

[6 : 51] There is faith looking towards accomplished fact and there is hope looking forward to the fulfilment of the great promises of God.

God. And so, I am saying that we Christians are God in some ways in the middle at this midpoint of human history.

Now, I may have shared this with you before but one modern theologian, Oscar Kuhlman, has put it in terms of the tension between D-Day and V-Day.

Remember that on D-Day the Allied forces landed on the shores of occupied Europe and it may be asserted that at that point the liberation of Europe was secured once the meat shed was established and that's what happened when Christ came in the flesh when Christ bore our sins on the cross of Calvary that was D-Day at that point God was committed to the liberation of mankind fight and yet there was an interval between D-Day and V-Day the victory was not secured it was guaranteed it was rendered certain by D-Day but between D-Day and V-Day there lay much fighting there lay much struggle and pain and much suffering and much sorrow when we live in the last days we live in the period between

God's D-Day and our final victory God has acted decisively and yet the victory remains to be consummated there is so much to be mocked up and carried to its completion now in some ways that is the tension between two advents if I can again put it to you this way from an Old Testament point of view you see as they looked at the star of the promise of God of the advent of Messiah and looked to the Old Testament saints like one star it has sometimes happened in astronomy that the telescope has shown one object and then as that science advanced as men made their calculations they found that the one object in fact was two objects and that's what happened from the standpoint of the

[9 : 51] Old Testament as they looked to the advent of Messiah to them it was just one advent but then as God's redemption and God's revelation unfolded we find that the advent is in fact twofold it bifurcates it becomes two great stars the first advent and the second advent so we live in the last days because the first advent has occurred and yet we live in hope and anticipation because the second advent is yet before us as God's great prospect and that really is the call of the blessed hope it is the call of the promises of God which remain yet unfulfilled and in fact unfolded within the second coming of Christ there are all the other promises of God well that means that

I'm going to focus tonight for the most part on the blessed hope in the specific sense of the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ in other words the blessed hope is the second coming of Jesus I want first of all to reflect with you on the various words which the New Testament uses to express this idea it is rather remarkable that it never refers to this event as the second coming or the second advent that phrase is not found anywhere at all in the New Testament but there are three other very interesting words and the words which although they're Greek words you can easily take away with you that is first of all the word parousia that maybe is the word most commonly used with regard to the second coming particularly by theologians and the word parousia really is maybe most dramatically understood as a royal visit it means literally the presence of God or of Christ with us parousia bringing Christ beside us putting Christ back again into this word parousia the coming of Jesus the arrival of Jesus the advent of Jesus that which he thanks once more the presence of the incarnate saviour with men it is a royal visit we're expecting a royal visit we're expecting that one day Christ will be among us again he'll be present on this earth a parousia

Christ beside us a royal visit that brings Christ near and then there is the word used in Titus chapter 2 and verse 13 which we read the word epiphany the appearing of the glory of our great God and saviour Jesus Christ we're expecting an epiphany an appearing of the glory of the Lord Jesus now that of course is said over against the fact that Peter mentioned in 1 Peter chapter 1 whom having not seen ye love Jesus is not at the moment apparent to our senses or accessible to our senses we cannot see him but one day there is to be an epiphany there is to be an appearing of

Jesus at the moment he is veiled at the moment there is no way we can see him but one day there will be an epiphany there is to be a parousia a royal visit there is to be an epiphany an appearing and thirdly there is the word apocalypse there is to be a parousia of Jesus there is to be an epiphany of Jesus there is to be an apocalypse of Jesus now apocalypse is literally an unveiling a revelation of Jesus when we discussed for example the idea of God revealing himself we saw that what God did is literally to give us an apocalypse of himself this is the title for example of the book of the revelation of Saint John which contains the apocalypse that God gave the apostle now the apocalypse really means literally

God drawing aside the veil at the moment there is a veil between us and Jesus but one day God will withdraw the veil and we shall see him as he is so there are these three words which express the idea of what we call the second advent parousia a royal visit epiphany and appearing apocalypses apocalypse or revelation now behind these three words there are I think substantially two great ideas the first idea is the idea of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ I say that because there has already in a manner you see been a parousia

[16:15] I will not leave you orphans or fatherless I will come again in a way you see Jesus came at Pentecost in the person of his Holy Spirit the Lord is the Spirit but there is a promise in the New Testament that one day the second person himself the Messiah the Savior will personally come he will come personally I might say he will come physically so long as you don't misunderstand me he will come certainly as the incarnate Savior he will come as the Savior who was taking a body but the body in which he will come will not be the same kind of body as he had when he came the first time it will be a transformed body so we hope we look for a personal return a physical return a return of the mediator of the incarnate

Lord Jesus Christ Christ now the physics of that are beyond us they are not revealed to us and I just want to say that we must never forget that our knowledge of physics is as limited as our knowledge of theology we have experience only of a three dimensional universe we can imagine only a three dimensional universe we can't even begin to imagine a four dimensional or a seven dimensional universe now I would also say in case you think that only a theologian speak of mysteries that even while physics deals with a three dimensional universe at the moment physicists often deal with concepts they can't begin to imagine ideas of which they can form no mental picture they can express them only in mathematical symbols now how the Lord

Jesus is going to come to this world I do not know how but I know that one day he will suddenly be present just as when the disciples were meeting in a closed room after the resurrection suddenly the Lord was among them now we do not know really what the resurrection body of Christ is it may be at the moment an intense concentration of light such as we can't begin to imagine but suddenly it will be here among us he will be here he will be in his universe he will be in this world the blessed hope the parousia of Jesus Christ the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ we're not thinking simply of some ideological or idealistic return or some spiritual return or return of his memory or the presence of his power but the presence of the son of

God incarnate himself so that he men will see him there will be an epiphany and appearance of the Lord Jesus secondly it's going to be glorious it is an appearing of the glory of Jesus now Christ has been in this world before he's been in this world in a state of humiliation in a state of poverty in a state of dependence and helplessness and weakness in a state of condemnation in what we might call a low condition but when he comes next he will come in the glory of his father with the holy angels now he's going to be glorious in his personal appearance he's going to be glorious in his accoutrements he's going to be glorious in his entourage he's going to be glorious in what he does because when it comes he will do things that man cannot begin to imagine now we have some glimpses you see of what it will be like there's the bout of transfiguration for the

Lord's humanity was transformed into a preternatural lightsomeness lightfulness and whiteness there is the great scene of the appearance of God on Mount Sinai when the mountains shook and there was smoke and thunder and lightning it was awe inspiring now these are suggestions he will come in the physical glory of his transformed humanness with a body so glorious we can't begin to imagine it I can only picture it frankly in terms of some magnificent nuclear explosion the kind of impact that might make the transformed humanness of Christ he will come accompanied by the injuries he will come with a trumpet with the voice of God audio visual accompaniments it's maybe imagery maybe symbolism but I don't think it's entirely that when he came before you see he came with all the insignia of poverty when he comes the next time he will come and all the insignia of majesty he came before veil and flesh the

[22 : 18] God had seen when he comes next time there will be no veil when he comes next it's an epiphany it's an apocalypse he will come in a way that makes so manifest there is no hiddenness there is no secrecy anymore but it will be obvious what he is every eye shall see we will come with splendor of God with magnificent accompaniments and doing magnificent things as we'll see in a moment so then he will come he will come personally he will come in a way that is glorious there will be an epiphany an apocalypse of his glory then we'll see the glory of Jesus and in that glory they will see the glory of God himself and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father it is personal it is glory so far

I want to keep on repeating this there is to be a parousia a royal visit there is to be an epiphany an appearing there is to be an apocalypse an unveiling and that means there is to be a personal return of Christ and there is to be a revelation of the glory of Christ a total unveiling of the glory of our Savior now we ask when I ask when because for good or ill most of the discussions on this subject have focused on that particular issue and I take it up because it opens our way to other more important matters so when is all this going to happen when the parousia the epiphany and the apocalypse when are these to be people well here again you see the Bible is not prepared to give us the clear answers that we ourselves want there are different strands let me share them with you it tells us first of all that nobody knows and that nobody can know the

Lord himself when he was asked during his life on earth said of that day and that hour knows no man no not the angels in heaven neither the son but the father now he is very explicit you see he says the father has not told me that he hasn't shared that with me as mediator the mediator did not know the savior did not know when this day and this hour was to be now I do wish that we would take that to heart now some scholars like John Calvin for example have argued that after the resurrection Jesus did possess this knowledge but if we looked at Acts chapter 1 we'd find that there again Jesus said it is not for you to know the times or the seasons which God has put and kept in his own power the father has kept these things to himself I will not say simply that the triune

God has kept them to himself but the father has kept these things to himself now when I hear people saying that Christ is coming in our lifetime my reaction is quite simply to shudder because it is very close to blasphemy if Jesus has told us that he didn't know if he has told us it is not for you to know now I will tell you I don't need to be a prophet to say this we're living in 1991 come the year 2000 the year 1999 there will arise in the Christian church in many parts of the world people will tell us that this is the end of the Christian era they will say so with very great confidence it happens virtually every cent lund at the end of every millennium and it will simply be a refusal to acquiesce in

God's own council God has said to us we don't know secondly there is in the New Testament the insistence that this second coming is going to be unexpected now this is in chapter 5 if I could just turn to it for a moment 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 you see Paul had the problem with those Thessalonians very early in the church this is a very early epistle maybe the first of Paul's epistles maybe the earliest New Testament document that's if you are some scholars as it happens mind you but that is what said by many scholars but as for the times and the seasons brethren you have no need to have anyone they were obsessed with this question of the times and the seasons and he said for you yourselves know that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night when people say there is peace and safety then there comes sudden destruction sudden destruction it will catch men unawares now of course that's true for example of the foolish virgins but the

[28 : 03] Lord the apostle is hinting at us that maybe two Christians will be caught out now the answer the logic here is not this that we won't be caught out because we know when Christ is coming because we don't know when he's coming but we are sober and we are on guard and we watch for every minute because at any minute Christ may come he may come at any minute now the first emphasis was we don't know the second emphasis is that the Lord may return at any moment now that's a very very solemn thing and it's a challenge in many ways to the reality of my faith and you do we believe that Christ I heard once that John Wesley was asked what would you do if you were told that

Christ were coming today and John Wesley supposed to have said I will do exactly what I'm doing now I wonder if many of us really could make such a claim are we ready will the Lord catch us as the householder catches the bad God coming like a thief in the night is he going to come with this dramatic suddenness and find us totally unprepared let us not sleep as others do but let us keep awake and be super let's stay awake let's keep ourselves control not because we know that Christ is coming in the 1990s but because we know that at any moment the Lord may return he may return at any moment so we're told that we don't know we're told that it may be at any moment but there is another and more difficult strand of

New Testament teaching on the subject which I don't profess to be able to handle altogether satisfactorily but it is this that there are certain signs to be fulfilled before the Lord returns now I think that the New Testament is fairly lucid as to there being such signs the signs are as follows the gospel must first be preached to all nations there will be a great tribulation the revelation of the man of sin the conversion of Israel now in some ways you see there is a tension between the strand and don't worry too much about tensions because I think it's important for us to grasp that we can't always tie up

God's word into neat packages there are tensions you see no matter how much you systematize and synthesize and harmonize God's word it's not like a do-it-yourself building kit where if there are screws left over you've done something wrong in actual fact the exact opposite is the case if your system is so good that there are no screws left over theologically then there's something wrong with your theology it's become far too neat and far too packaged so here there is a tension you see the Lord has said at one level I become at any moment and at this other level he's saying I will not come until these signs be fulfilled nevertheless the tension is not as acute as appears I say that for this reason but it seems to me that some of these signs have been fulfilled and were fulfilled long ago for example the gospel preached to all nations now in some ways that began at

Pentecost itself we should not see that in terms as we tend to do today of the word of God being taken to all the people groups in the world and therefore say that there are so many hundred groups left and therefore the Lord can't come until those groups have been evangelized the point is that the bringing of the gospel to the Gentiles that has happened the Lord said the kingdom will not be consummated until the gospel has gone to the Gentiles to the nations that in my view has already happened I think also regard to the tribulation it's difficult to disentangle two strands here there is the tribulation that came on the Jews under the Roman army in AD 70 under Tiberius but there is also the fact you see that the existence of the whole church of

[33 : 37] God between the advents is a time of tribulation all all that will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution Paul speaks in Romans 8 of the sufferings of the present time as if those sufferings this tribulation is coextensive with the whole Christian era and I am rather reluctant to accommodate the notion that the tribulation is something that lies in a limited segment of Christian history on the contrary it is coextensive with Christian history you see today you may say to me today but today we don't have tribulation well you know it is worth you taking aboard this fact that there are more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in any other century in history if we think of the

Russian persecution under Stalin and even more viciously under Khrushchev strangely the Chinese persecution the Japanese persecution in Manchuria and in Korea the work of Idi Amin and other phenomena of that kind you see it has been tribulation we have lived in a century of tribulation it's a magnificent word you know the New Testament this word thlipsis it means literally a crushing and I think if you've ever been to a quarry you'll find that in quarries there are these machines that crush you throw huge rocks in and they come out as gravel chips and that's where the church of God is you see in the thlipsis in the crusher and that is not simply for a little part of her existence but that's where she lives she lives in the tribulation in Revelation 7 you have that great question who are these arrayed in white robes these are those who have come out of the great tribulation and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb so the tribulation is already a reality and then the revelation of the man now it is

I must confess that with some other reformed men of very much greater eminence than myself like B.B. Warfield and Harder's Moss I do not know who this figure actually is it is obvious that the Antichrist was already in some sense active in the age of the New Testament itself denying the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ now whether that is the total manifestation of the man of lawlessness of the Antichrist I do not know but the Apostle John said the Antichrist is already here he is here denying the humanity of Jesus now it is debated but you see and I'm dreadfully sorry that I can't make all these things so tidy for you but is the man of sin the same as the Antichrist that is not self evident but it is fairly probable but if the Antichrist has not been revealed then something dreadful awaits the church but it is possible you see that the

Antichrist was already there in the age of the New Testament it's possible that the Antichrist was the Roman Emperor or the Roman Empire or that the Antichrist is as some have held the Pope of Rome a particular Pope in my view the Antichrist and Paul as a person not an institution but there is so much ambivalence here you see so I don't think that that sign can be safely put aside and say we cannot say the Lord won't come tonight because Antichrist hasn't yet been revealed I don't feel able to say that and so I'm saying with all these three signs the gospel preached to all the nations the tribulation the Antichrist it is quite possible that all of these have already been fulfilled and that none of them is an impediment to Christ suddenly appearing here before this meeting closes

I think we have to grasp something of the urgency of that but there does remain this other promise this other sign that is laid down for us in Romans 9 to 11 that is the conversion of Israel now it has been the prevailing view among reformed theologians that the teaching of that chapter is that one day God will bring his people whom we should not call his ancient people but his people still God will bring them to his own Messiah and God will through that conversion of Israel bring life from the dead to the whole church of God and incomparable blessing to the whole of mankind that shall live trends to Israel after the flesh and to promise Israel after the flesh the blessing of national, ethnic, Jewish faith in the Messiah. Now I'm very conscious that in the past people have interpreted prophecy with very great confidence and I may be wrong in my interpretation of Romans 9 to 11 but it seems to me that the only impediment at the moment to believing that Jesus may come at any time is this promise of God to Israel. My current position is that in submission to Romans 9 to 11 the Lord will not come until this great event has happened but let me say again I hold my interpretation of Romans 9 to 11 with a fairly loose hand and I would want to to insist on that. So what is the teaching then with regard to the timing of the second advent? First we don't know, secondly it may occur at any time, thirdly it will not occur until certain signs have been fulfilled. But there is a fourth strand too and it is this, that the second advent will occur at the end. In other words the second advent is the last thing.

[40 : 55] There is nothing beyond the second advent. To the New Testament as I understand it, the second advent is the absolute terminus. It is the ultimum, the last thing. It is the goal, the climax, the consummation, the denouement, the unraveling of human history.

It is the Omega point. Now those of you who have used computer should go in will realise at once that that is inconsistent with certain millennial views. But my objection to those millennial views to large extent is that they make the second advent only a point on the line. The relative eyes. As I see in the New Testament it is the end of the line. It is the blessed hope.

It is the consummation. Now that means that the second advent is contemporaneous, simultaneous with certain other great events. For example, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the dead, the consummation of heaven and earth.

There is no interval theologically between the second advent and any of these. When the Lord comes, he will raise the dead. When the Lord comes, he will judge the dead. When the Lord comes, he will transform the universe.

That's why the question, will he come to this earth or come to another earth is rather irrelevant. Because he will come to change this earth, to change in fact this whole universe.

[42 : 46] So I spoke, you see, I spoke earlier on, of the Lord coming in glory. Now that glory means that he will come looking absolutely magnificent.

It means that he will come with the most amazing audio visual accompaniments. It means that he will come with the most glorious writing you have ever imagined.

But above all it means, you see, that when he comes, he will do things that you just can't begin to imagine. He will open the graves. And he will change the face, I don't think simply of the earth, but of the whole universe.

Now it's inconceivable, you see, what's going to happen. But we're told that when the day of the Lord comes, the elements will melt with fervent heat. The heavens and the earth as we know them will be dissolved, loosed. It's beautiful.

To us especially so because we now understand, you see, the nature of matter. We know about chemical bonds. The Lord will pull all those chemical bonds apart, bit by bit, dissolve the elements, pull the bonds apart, and give us a new heaven and a new earth.

[44 : 05] And the glory of the second advent is to a large extent a question of the things the Lord will do. Not only what he looks like and sounds like, but what he will do. He will raise the dead. He will judge the living of the dead.

And he will change and transform this whole universe. That's what he will do. That's in fact why he is coming. You go back to the ancient creeds of the church, to the apostles' creed, we're told, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

So, I'm saying for the moment that the Lord Jesus comes at the end. Beyond the advent there is nothing. Beyond the advent there is only the consummation.

So, when will the Lord come? Now, if we just grasp, and this is for yourselves to study, but your own pleasure in the year to come. When, what does the Bible say as to when the Lord will come? It tells us, first of all, we don't know.

It tells us, secondly, he may come at any time. It tells us, thirdly, that he will not come until certain signs have been fulfilled. And it tells us, finally, he will come at the end.

[45 : 21] Now, let me close by asking you a question, and I'm not going to close all that quickly, in case you get too relaxed too much. But I want to bring it, if I can, land it by raising this question.

Why doesn't the free church, you see, and evangelical churches in general, why don't they preach the second coming?

Now, we've heard that objection, you see. The objection that we don't preach the second coming. Now, let me suggest to you, in fact, that when that objection is put, it is normally put from a particular theological standpoint, and it really means, why don't we preach millennialism?

That's what it means. And I, although I have an aversion to discussing things which are largely speculative, it would be unfair to you to totally avoid this topic, because I'm sure many of you came, at least in the hope of hearing something about it.

What am I going to say about millennials? Well, there are, as you know, three ideas of this. There is the amillennial view, that there is no millennium.

[46 : 41] There is the postmillennial view, that the Lord comes at the end of the millennium. And there is the premillennial view, that the Lord comes before the millennium, to set up a glorious earthly kingdom, which is the millennium.

Now, when people say to us, you don't preach the second coming, they mean that we don't preach premillennials. They mean that we don't preach, that the Lord is going to come any day, to set up his kingdom on earth.

Now, there are two forms of millennialism, and the best service I can render to you on this subject, is simply to familiarise you with what other Christians believe on this issue.

There are two kinds of premillennialism. There is the simple, classical, premillennial view, that someday the Lord is going to come, and going to set up in this world, a kingdom, which will be spiritually glorious, and which will be virtually a heaven on earth.

Now, I've said that that is classical, simple premillennialism. There is no reason whatever why Orthodox Calvinists, and good Presbyterians, and Evangelical Baptists, and Methodists, and Anglicans should not hold such a view.

[48 : 18] It was the view of some of the most saintly and most revered of the Fathers of the Free Church of Scotland, notably Andrew and Horatius Bonner, and above all, the Reverend Robert Murray McChain.

They held to a classic premillennial point of view. Now, although I've called it simple, it is in actual fact very far from simple.

For example, it involves that when the Lord comes, he will raise the Christian dead. And those dead will live on this earth with the believers who are still living, and also with ungodly people who are still ungodly people.

And I find that a pretty momentous difficulty in this particular theory. It requires a resurrection of the Christian dead when the Lord comes. But that is the classic premillennial view.

But then there is secondly something very much more complicated, what is called dispensational premillennialism. Now, I am not going into all the intricacies of this particular theory.

[49 : 31] It is the dominant form of premillennialism today. It is also the single most distinctive characteristic of American fundamentalism.

Virtually every American Christian is a dispensational premillennialist. Now, for my present purpose, this view means that at any moment, Christ may come and rapture the saints.

In other words, he may come and take all the believers away from this world. They will disappear suddenly. It is a secret parousia. He comes secretly and removes all the believers.

Why? Because he wants them to avoid the tribulation. And then afterwards, you see, there is seven years tribulation.

And at the end of those seven years tribulation, the Lord comes again in apocalypse and epiphany to set up the millennium.

[50 : 39] And when he does, so that means that he will set up the temple in Jerusalem and he will reinstate most, if not all, of the ancient practices of the Jewish people.

And of course, he will also destroy the enemies of the Jewish people because the Old Testament provinces are so full, you see, of what God will do to the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Edomites and so on and so forth and to Gog and to Magog.

Now, there are some elements of this which I find difficulty, I must confess, expounding with a great, with a straight face. But it is important for you to grasp both its significance ecclesiastically because it's held by so many Christians and also its very, very great importance politically.

Because with the current predominance of fundamentalism in America, this particular view of human history has a very, very important bearing on American foreign policy because that is why, for example, there is such a commitment to Israel and it is also why American public opinion is politically so opposed to the Arabic community and also as it happens to the Soviet bloc because that is seen to be Gog and Magog.

Now, I don't want to over-dramatize or over-simplify, but these things are relevant. For example, I know that it is very difficult to raise any funds in America to send evangelistic literature to the Soviet bloc, to Gog and Magog, because really they are under God's curse.

[52 : 31] Now, I don't want to go too far into this, really, but it is an astonishing fact. You see, if you think of the Southern Baptist denomination in the United States, there are over 12.5 million of them.

This is their theology. And it's a theology also of many Presbyterians in North America. The whole fundamentalist community, with very, very few exceptions, and there are some, thankfully, is very much committed to this point of view.

Now, let me say to you, it is not in its origin an American doctrine. When it began, in fact, it was first formulated, curiously, for those who are interested in church history, in one of Edward Irving's meetings, by one of Irving's prophets.

And it was taken up by Jane Darby, who founded what was called Plymouth Brethrenism, Brethrenism, and it became really the staple doctrine of Brethrenism, and remained that until quite recently.

It is now not so important in Brethren circles as it was. Now, what is the practical consequence? The practical consequence of it is that to those Christians, the great object of hope is the rupture.

[53 : 47] That's what they're all longing with. So many American television programs, and if you hear reports about American TV religion, it is difficult, really.

You may think they're exaggerated, but it's very difficult to exaggerate, just how appallingly bad many of them are. And the focus falls, to a large extent, on the rupture, not on the Second Advent.

Now, my difficulty with all Premillennialism is that it says the Second Advent is not the end, it's only a point.

In fact, to dispensationalists, there are two Second Advents. There is a pre-tribulation Advent to rupture the saints, and there is a post-tribulation rupture to set up the Millennial Kingdom.

Now, I'm not going into the details and the arguments that these people use, but it may be helpful to you to know that this is part of the wider theological context in which we live at the present time, and it is not something that is of practical relevance.

[55 : 02] It is enormously important in its influence on the psychology of America and therefore of the whole Western world.

It is worth it if I can just take liberties with you for a moment. You see, there is a real problem in America in that the journalists in America have for long believed that religion is a dead duck, that it died in the 1920s with a famous monkey trial in Tennessee.

Now, that really is such a misreading of the situation because religion is so alive in America.

The church is still of enormous political importance. And these media people have just begun to wake it up and realize we've had in succession three presidents, all of whom are products of fundamentalism, Jimmy Carter, Reagan, and now Bush.

All of them, you see, elected by the fundamentalist lobby in North America. Now, the media, you see, would never have expected that. It's an interesting fact that journalists, most Americans, the vast majority of them, are foreign believers in the existence of God in the rapture and all those other things.

[56 : 29] And the journalists are. And there is a fascinating tension between American media and the real America. And that is probably also true in this country that the media convey certain impressions as to the strength or weakness of the church.

And those impressions are probably completely false. Now, I'm not going to end on that note. My own position on this whole subject is this. I do not like the word millennium because the word millennium means an earthly kingdom which is to a large extent carnal, a kingdom in which there is vengeance on our enemies and there is bliss and peace and so on for ourselves.

So, in that respect, I am an amillennialist. But I am an amillennialist with a complication, as you can readily understand.

I am an amillennialist who believes in the conversion of Israel. And as a result of that, a worldwide revival of unprecedented power and magnitude.

Now, that makes me a classical postmillennialist. I just don't like the label. The word millennium does not mean the same to a premill and a postmill.

[57 : 56] To a postmillennialist, it means unprecedented spiritual revival, spiritual power. Nothing to do with kingdoms and power and revenge, but a spiritual kingdom.

So, I am saying then, that my general judgment is, and this is a matter of testimony, rather than a matter, I can understand, of argument and theology, that I am an amillennialist who believes in the conversion of Israel and through that conversion that life from the dead will come to the church and incomparable blessing to the whole of mankind.

When the Jew begins to become a Christian missionary, then I think we'll see astonishing things happen. But I want to end on this note, on the great note that 1 Thessalonians 4 ends on.

Comfort one another with these words. You see, Paul is giving us this teaching in this closing paragraph of the chapter. They've lost their beloved brethren.

Some of their friends have fallen asleep, but their loved ones have fallen asleep, and Paul is trying to comfort them. Well, what is the comfort? The comfort, he says, is the parousia. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and even so, through Jesus, God will bring with them those who have fallen asleep.

[59 : 23] When Jesus comes back, the Christian dead will come back with them. Their souls will return. And God, Christ, will then raise their bodies and reunite soul and body.

And they'll be caught up to glory. We shall be ever with the Lord. Now, the general point I want to make to use this, you see, as we Christians face bereavement and face death, we have no comfort but words.

the word of God. And the word of God that is especially important to us in our sorrow is what God promises us to our ultimate destiny.

And it's there. So shall we always be with the Lord. What is heaven? It is simply that.

It is being with the Lord. It's expressed in astonishing terms, especially in John's Gospel. That we shall be where Jesus himself is and the glory he had with the Father before the world was.

[60 : 26] And he prays, in fact, in the greatest hyperbole in human history or human language. The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them.

It means that for us the journey ends face to face with God, beside God, and even in God. where are those who tonight through Jesus sleep?

Where are our beloved dead? They are with the Lord. Where are we going to be? So shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. May God grant it so. Now I want to thank you before I conclude tonight for your support of those meetings and for the stimulus it has been to come along and to have to shape my own thought in response to the promptings, conscious or otherwise, of this audience.

And I hope that what has been said may be of some help to somebody. It's been of enormous help to myself and I do thank you for that. I think perhaps we will show our particular thankfulness at the end of this series to Professor MacLeod by relieving him of the tension of answering questions publicly tonight.

[61 : 57] But there will be a cup of tea served after the meeting and I'm sure that the Professor can wait for a wee while and if there are any particular questions which you want to ask him privately then I'm quite sure that he will be very willing to do that.

I do have the duty and the pleasure of finally thanking Professor MacLeod for all his ministry to us and I really don't want to do that extensively because I think words won't adequately express our appreciation particularly those of us and I think that goes for most of us who have been at almost all the lectures not only over this series of ten lectures but over the other series of ten lectures two years ago and I certainly feel personally that it has greatly strengthened my understanding and my faith and of course we have to acknowledge that that is not due only to Professor MacLeod but it is due to the goodness of the Lord through Professor MacLeod and I'm sure what I say for myself I say for all of you and as we thank Professor MacLeod we do want to return our thanks to the Lord for his goodness in allowing Professor

MacLeod to be used in this way amongst us over these lectures and it is indeed sad to think not only of our coming to an end of being under such a ministry but I think it's a little bit sad to be coming to an end of the particular fellowship that we've had on these Friday evenings and therefore I think we owe each other thanks that we've been able to be together in the fellowship of these meetings and one or other of us I think will have to try and work out some other means by which we can resuscitate that fellowship sometime quite soon because I think it would just not be easy to think of it being finished forever but certainly the blessings of tonight do remind us that there is a greater fellowship and an even closer fellowship that we can all look forward to and I'm sure we would say that this has been a foretaste that encourages us to look forward to that final fellowship so thanks to Professor MacLeod but thanks to you all can I just end before we finally conclude with one or two intimations and after I've made these perhaps if Evan is at the ready we'll sing the final three verses of Psalm 72 before the benediction can you manage that okay by one means or another there is a cup of tea provided at the end of our meeting and we do thank those who are providing that cup of tea

Frank will be available for the sale of tapes of the previous lectures and for those of you who want a copy of tonight's lecture there will be a list and you can put your name and address clearly on that list and the tape will finally be folded to you and an invoice will go out at the time that the tape goes out and you can post the remittance to Frank at that time and then I think the only other thing I have to say is that a card was left on the table and I imagine it's that I might remind folks and perhaps intimate to some visitors who might not know that there's another sort of meeting in this building tomorrow night and it's the 20th Glasgow Sarmody Recital which will be upstairs in the church beginning tomorrow evening at 7 o'clock and that meeting is always a great help to us all I suppose we would call it an inspirational meeting when we rejoice in praising the

Lord together and the word from the chairman for the evening who will be the Reverend Donald McKeever of Cumbernauld Free Church but all our welcome to that recital tomorrow evening in the church beginning at 7 o'clock so now we'll stand to sing the final verses of Psalm 72 which begin his name forever shall endure last time the sun it shall make rest in in on plus

[66 : 56] The Lord our God, the Lord of Israel.

For He alone, the wondrous words in glory, God, excel.

And blessed be His glorious name to all eternity.

The Lord our God, His glory fill.

Amen. So let it be. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit remain with us now and always.

[68 : 20] Amen.