Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5

Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-12-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we study two readings dealing with the second coming of the Lord. We go into some detail about the signs and events that will precede His coming.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Apocrypha and won't be covered in Mass Notes today. This body of work provides some important historical insights into the 400-year silent period just prior to the birth of Jesus. We encourage our readers to become familiar with the cultural and historical context leading up to the publishing of the New Testament.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The Book of First Thessalonians concerns Paul's address to the people in this region to encourage them in light of false teachings that had entered the church and to exhort them to practice a godly lifestyle. The fourth chapter open with an exhortation to the latter. "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more" (1 Thess 4:1). It then moves to the former matter, confronting false teaching that the church had experienced.

Second Reading:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NAS95 13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Paul explained to the believers that just as the Lord Jesus promised, He would return first to gather those who had already died (v. 14), then some instant later the believers who remained alive until His coming (v. 15). This second coming (or rapture) would proceed first with a shout from the Lord, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. Students of the Book of Revelation will recognize this description as following the pattern in that Book (Revelation 11:15). There we see how the return of the Lord Jesus will follow a period of momentous persecution of Jews and Christians (Revelation 12:13-17, we encourage you to study it). Paul then told them to "comfort one another with these words" (v. 18). If we look a bit beyond today's reading we will see that phrase "comfort one another" a second time, but in the context of the promise from God that believers will not enter into the Great Tribulation (or Day of the Lord's judgment, "DOL").

It is helpful in understanding today's message to read forward to 2 Thessalonians where Paul provided an insight into why providing comforting words was necessary. In 2 Thess 2:1 Paul said, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come" (vv. 1-2). He went onto explain that the second coming of the Lord Jesus wasn't something that they could miss because Jesus' return would not happen until the worldwide revelation of the Antichrist, the man of sin (2 Thess 2:3). Before the Lord Jesus returns, a world ruler will emerge who will at some point will take his seat in the temple and proclaim himself to be god (2 Thess 2:4). In this section, Paul told them not to let anyone deceive them as these events would be patently obvious (2 Thess 2:3). When Jesus returns, believers will be unable to miss it! The world however will go on about their daily business (Matthew 24:38).

The Thessalonians were falling for false ideas about Jesus return and the same continues until today. The false religious cult of Jehovah Witnesses has taught over the years this very same doctrine, however with a unique twist. They teach that Jesus returned invisibly. This false doctrine is exactly what Paul corrected in today's reading.
Note, if you would like to learn more about the JW's teaching regarding this matter just place the search phrase "Jesus returned invisibly" into a search engine.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson continues the theme of the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Today's reading follows Jesus' famous sermon known as the Olivet Discourse where He explained to His disciples the events that would follow and the signs to expect before His return. He told them that the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:2), many false messiahs (christs) would come and lead many astray (v. 5), the world would be filled with war (vv. 6-7), natural disasters would increase with famines (v. 7c) and then great persecution would begin against believers (vv. 9-11), and much of the world would fall away from following the true faith revealed in the Scriptures (v. 12). Jesus taught that believers were to endure all of this until the end at which point the Gospel would be preached to the entire world, an event clearly displayed in Revelation 14. "And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (Revelation 14:6). Interestingly, nowhere does Scripture teach that believers will be excluded from the persecution leading up to Jesus' return. Rather, believers in the end times are presented with a message saying, "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints" (Revelation 13:10, 14:12). The balance of the previous chapter (Chapter 24) is dedicated to Jesus' teaching about His return, how their will be signs in the sky and on the earth (Matthew 24:29-35), and how His coming will be unexpected for those not watching (Matthew 24:36-44, 50).

The key ideas advancing in the section leading up to today's reading are a call to watchfulness and faithfulness of believers. In today's reading a third theme emerges, that of readiness. With this crucially important context in mind, let's study today's reading. [We encourage you to read all of Matthew 24 before today's reading.]

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 25:1-13 NAS95 1 Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

The reading is a "kingdom parable," in which Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to an earthly event to present a spiritual meaning. The reading opens with, "the kingdom of heaven will be comparable" pointing to the future, heavenly sense (v. 1). The spiritual kingdom, Jesus teaches, is like a group of ten brides, the first five who are prepared for His coming and the second five who are not. The Old Testament portrays Yahweh of His people (for example in Hosea 2:19), and here in the parable Jesus as the husband of the brides (v. 1). According to Jewish customs, a bride would leave their homes

with a group of friends who gather in a procession to meet the bridegroom. The groom who would then join them at the marriage feast but at some unannounced time. Since the feast often occurred at night, lamps were necessary and along with them was required a sufficient amount of oil to keep them burning during the wait of an unexpected length. In our day we can at least partially relate as we often leave the wedding ceremony and wait at the reception hall for the newly united couple to join the group at some unexpected time. After riding around in a limousine drinking champagne perhaps this comes at an even later time than expected!

After a very long wait, both groups of people fall asleep (v. 5). This reminds us of how Jesus' own disciples fell asleep during the night before He willingly surrendered His life to be crucified as a substitute for our sins (Matthew 26:40). This is where the story takes a turn. At midnight, there was shout and both groups got up and trimmed their oil-fired lamps (v.7) but only the prudent ones had sufficient fuel to light the way to the feast with the bridegroom. The imprudent virgins begged for fuel and then had no other choice than to head off at midnight in the dark to buy fuel from some sort of 24-hour Walmart which didn't exist in that era.

In the parable we see the theme of readiness. There are two groups of people, the first ones who are ready for Jesus' return, and those who are not. The first group is qualitatively different from the second in that they are "prudent" in contrast to the second group that is "foolish." The foolish group recognizes the need at some point to barter with the prudent ones upon seeing the imminent signs of Jesus' return, something that we discussed in the introduction regarding the signs of His coming (Matthew 24:1-13) However, in the same way that Jesus described in Chapter 24 regarding those left behind to perish in the worldwide flood in Noah's time (Matthew 24:37-39), the foolish group will be locked out of the kingdom of heaven (v. 10, "the door was shut." We must not make too little of the significant difference between the two groups of people.

There are two groups of people in the world, those who believe and those who do not. God loves the world so much that He gave He sent His only begotten Son to us, so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Go says, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Believers travel along a narrow road filled with obstacles allowed by God to deepen their dependence upon Him, whereas those in the second, larger group follow the broad road carried along by the ways and whims of the world (Matthew 7:13-14). When Jesus returns it will be too late for those on the broad road to seek faith in the Lord Jesus and they will be eternally rejected from the presence of the King (John 3:36).

As believers in the Lord Jesus we are called to patiently await upon Jesus' return while going about the business building and equipping the kingdom of God. Unlike the foolish who are unprepared for Jesus' return, we are aware of the many signs and prophecies given to us in the Scriptures regarding this imminent event. God calls us not to be believe the false teachings that we have been left behind because the Lord has already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). God has given us a profundity of signs to expect before His return such that we **will** be prepared unless the foolish ones who will be forever locked out of the kingdom of heaven.

I remember well the dark day that lived in infamy, now known as "9-1-1." I was in our office in suburban Detroit that morning, and first heard about the unfolding tragedy when one of the secretaries from the law office across the hall came knocking on our door to tell us about it and to invite us to watch it unfold on the television set that they had in their waiting room. As the tragedy grew worse and worse, me and my Christian coworker were struck by the terror of the whole thing and began to talk to the other two employees in our office about whether this was somehow signaling the end of the world and the return of Jesus. These two people came from a background of nominal Christianity, having been raised in families that attended church services at least on Christmas and Easter, "chreasters" some have called them. Because of the state of shock I was in, I found myself pleading with these two to find faith in the Lord Jesus for protection from the curse that was coming upon the country as the scene in New York and elsewhere unfolded. They looked at me in a state of dumfound amazement that I will remember forever.

In a few days the reality of what had happened settled in and although some people were moved to attend church services and seek God, many slowly returned to the normal paths of their lives. My two fellow employees also returned to their lives, and neither of them, at least as far as I know, ever made a move to find faith in God through faith in His Son. Although these two men are some of the smartest people I have ever worked with, they were not wise enough to read the signs of Jesus' imminent return. For Jesus will meet us one way or the other and we can be in one of four groups, and today's readings greatly inform us about them.

1. Believers who die before the return of the Lord Jesus. These will meet Jesus when they die (John 14:3) at which point they will enter heaven for an eternity only to return with Jesus in the air during the Second Coming where they will receive glorified bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

2. Believers who are alive and meet Jesus when He returns (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and receive their glorified bodies at that instant while still alive.

3. Nonbelievers who die before the return of the Lord Jesus. These meet the Lord Jesus as their judge with inevitable sentencing for their sin with no means of repaying their eternal debts (Matthew 7:23, Matthew 25:41)

The people in the first three groups are the wise servants, those who procured the oil of the Holy Spirit before the coming of their Lord. In contrast, those in the last group were foolish and persisted in their nonbelief until it was too late. Today's message is a call to do the work Jesus has called us to do in reaching out to those in this last category. Perhaps all of could benefit from a sort of personal 911 emergency to motivate us to reach out to our lost friends and coworkers.

Reflection Questions

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1. In what ways does knowing the signs of Jesus' coming help you to be better prepared to serve the Lord Jesus in the area(s) that He has called you? In what ways does knowing the signs comfort you during the significant challenges you face in your life?

2. Understanding the big picture of the end times is essential to be able to recognize the gradual progression of events we see around us leading up to Jesus' return. Read the following summary which provides a high level of some of the things we talked about today but also includes events promised to those "foolish brides" who ignore God's teaching on the matters of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Then, answer the question that follows.

The return of the Lord follows the conclusion of a period of judgment known as the "Day of the Lord," a prominent theme throughout the Old Testament. This period was first mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased" (Isaiah 2:12). The Day of the Lord, or DOL, is mentioned at least another 18 times in the Old Testament including Ezekiel 13:5, "You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the **day of the LORD**" (emphasis added). This time, also known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7) is the conclusion of the period of time during which God will pour out His judgments upon the unbelieving world left after the church has been "caught up" from the earth as described by Saint Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. After Jesus returns with His church (Revelation 19:11,14) the world is restored to a time of worldwide peace under the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ for a period of one thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

In what ways does understanding the eschatological picture (the end times) help us to reach out to share the Good News of the Gospel with people who don't believe?

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11-27-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week we will learn about the importance of responding to God's revelation of what will happen in the future. Each Scripture passage deals with a dimension of what will take place in the future. Knowing the future gives clarity to the present and helps us to interpret the events of the past from God's perspective. This is true for us who know and study the Bible. God has given us His precious Word so that we can be informed about ultimate reality, thus making wise decisions with the one life that each one of us gets.

On June 25, 1876, the Indian scout named Goes-Ahead warned General George Custer not to attack the Indian encampment at Little Bighorn, South Dakota. Goes-Ahead was so certain about the negative outcome that he removed his US Army uniform and changed into traditional Native American Indian clothing, which was supposed to ease the entry of his soul to the afterlife. Custer considered these actions as "defeatist" and was so angry at this and the other scout's behavior that the General dismissed them on the spot, an action which saved the Indian's lives. Custer continued with the attack that in retrospect had very predictable results. Not a single Army soldier in Custer's brigade survived the attack and as a result, little was known about what actually happened during the battle. It wasn't until General Terry arrived two days later on June 27 that anyone even knew that the brigade had perished. "Custer's Last Stand," as it came to be known, was a disaster for Custer and his men because he was ill-prepared for the battle. The well-skilled and qualified General was alert, yet he ultimately wasn't equipped with the resources necessary to win the battle. Even though he was forewarned, he did not take the warning seriously, and thus, suffered irrevocable damages.

What can we learn about General Custer's Last Stand? Although this military leader was forewarned, he overestimated his capabilities and underestimated the enemy's force. Likewise, we often overestimate our own abilities, and underestimate the power of the enemy. We often think that we can handle life on our own. What we don't know is that the enemy of our soul is a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). This puts us in a precarious place, for we were originally designed by God to rule and reign with Him (Genesis 1:26-27), but we are hounded by an enemy. The natural state of humankind, now, is one of being under God's wrath (Romans 1:18); not being able to give God our full allegiance, devotion, and worship. He gives us every chance to repent of our disloyalty and find our protection from impending judgment by His gift of Christ Jesus. In His kindness, God warns His precious creation, humans, about the return of the Lord and the coming tribulation for those who haven't trusted in Christ through faith. Yet many still persist in their sin and unbelief. The Bible is full of admonition for people to believe while they still have the chance. The Prophet Isaiah said, "Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near." In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, God instructed Noah to build an ark to save his family from the coming global flood (Genesis 6:13). Although the people didn't have the Bible, Noah, who was called a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), warned the people about their coming destruction. In spite of the fact that they were cautioned for 120 years (Genesis 6:3) the entire world perished except for Noah and his family (7:21-22). Though only Noah's family believed, it's certain that anyone who have sought refuge in the ark would have been allowed to enter and be saved.

The Holy Scriptures play a very important role in warning the people in our era about the need to repent and trust in the finished work of Jesus for forgiveness of their sin and deliverance from the tribulation that is prophesied to come upon the earth. People in the western world today have even less of an excuse to say that they haven't been warned since the Bible is readily available to them. In past eras this wasn't always the case. Not everyone has had access to the Bible in order to receive proper instruction about how to become a believer in God and His plan of salvation. Many years after Noah's flood in the Old Testament, there was an era when the Bible became lost to the Jewish people and was rediscovered during the reign of godly King Josiah. This discovery led to a vigorous revival among the Jews. If you desire to read more, this history is found in Second Kings Chapter 22. The moral of the story from Custer's Last Stand and the teachings of the Bible is to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah, a prophet who spoke to the people of Judah, in a time when they were threatened by a formidable enemy. They were the southern tribes of Israel, small compared to their brothers who had already fallen into captivity to the powerful Assyrians. Isaiah spoke several themes to his countrymen in the time of their suffering: 1) Take heart, for God is sending the Messiah (one who will deliver them from their oppression); 2) Repent from trusting in self and trust in God's salvation; and 3) God's has an important future in store for those who align themselves with His purposes and value system. A prominent theme in the Bible is prophecy concerning the eventual restoration and spiritual awakening of the Jewish people. In the first

reading, we see the Prophet Isaiah making a prediction about the future restoration of the Nation of Israel. The reading is from Isaiah Chapter 2. Read about God's plan for Israel and the prominent place that Jerusalem will play in the future. As you read, underline the word "will" each time it appears in the text.

First Reading:

1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 Now it will come about that in the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways, And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD. (Isaiah 2:1-5)

In the introduction today, we saw that the prophetic message of the Bible was to listen to God's warnings and to be prepared in order to avoid future judgment. In this part of Isaiah's message, the point is not necessarily a warning, but rather a disclosure to all the people in the world what God will do regarding His People Israel. Isaiah said that in the "last days" God will establish Jerusalem as the true religious capital of the world (v.2). Jerusalem will be where God will live and judge the nations, and the location of His teaching that will go throughout the world (vv. 3-4). God will bring worldwide peace and weapons will be eliminated and converted into devices for peaceful use (v.4). The entire nation of Israel will then walk in the light of the Lord (v.5). It is interesting to note that people of all nations will look to the God of the Jews to teach them His ways. The fulfillment of this prophecy is already underway, as people of all nations and languages have heard the message of salvation and have responded by following Jesus, the Messiah. Isaiah's message can bring us hope that God's plan for His people will ultimately prevail and bring worldwide peace. As in-grafted believers in Israel (Romans 11:17) this should provide us with comfort that God can and will work in our lives as well.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The letter to the Roman Christians, written by Saint Paul, provides an astounding amount of information about God's version of reality. Throughout the book, Paul delivers the bad news (all have sinned, Romans 3:23) and that the wages of this sin is death (Romans 6:23). But he does not leave us in a state of hopelessness, for we find out that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The good news is that Christ has paid the price for our freedom with His blood shed on the cross. We can now be set free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). In this part of the letter, Paul has laid out the plan of salvation and is now warning us of the importance of what we do with this information. In the previous verses, he told the Roman believers to owe no one anything,

except the outstanding debt to love. Love does not take advantage of others, therefore, love is the ultimate motivator and moral behind the law of God. Love is to be the pervasive character trait of Jesus' people.

Second Reading:

11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:11-14)

Paul's underlying assumption is that people are changed when they follow God's plan of salvation. When our hearts are awakened by God's love, we no longer walk like the people living in darkness, without the love of God in their lives. We don't love in order to attain salvation, we love as a result of God's salvific work in our hearts. After the point of surrendering to God, we have a role to play to walk by faith in this new life He has given us. We "lay aside the deeds of darkness" recognizing the destructive nature of this past way of life.

Paul told the Roman Christians to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" but then went on to tell them to take off other things. In verse 13 Paul said to "put on the armor of light" and take off drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and envy (v.13) and lust (v.14). Paul said in Colossians 3, "But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, [and] abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its [evil] practices" (vv.8-9). God offers us empowerment to be able to take things off through the putting on of the mind of Jesus Christ. There isn't a magical formula about how we can put on the mind of Jesus Christ, but some ways are through the study of His Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. By studying God's Word, seeking the Lord in prayer and fellowshipping with other believers, we start to recognize the patterns of darkness and begin to make no provision for the flesh (the old way of life apart from Christ) so that we can walk in newness of life. It is a battle, and unless we surrender daily to God's Spirit who gives us the power to resist the Enemy, we will have as much success as Custer in his last stand.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

In the Gospel reading today, we turn to Matthew and the subject of eschatology, the study of the final events in the history of the world. This section of Scripture is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley from the Temple. Jesus startled his disciples by saying that there would be a day when none of the huge temple stones would be left on top of each other. This was mind-boggling to his disciples and they naturally asked when this would happen. Jesus answered their question with the teaching of His return to earth and

the end times. He gave them information so that they would be forewarned and could prepare accordingly. Thanks to their faithful retelling of this information, we too, are forewarned and can live in light of what we know will take place in the future.

Gospel Reading:

36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matthew 24:36-44)

While no one knows the exact time of Christ's return, there will be many signs to help His followers understand what is about to take place. Amazingly enough, many people will miss these signs, for they will be all caught up in assuming that the world will continue as normal. For they will be eating and drinking and planning for the future (marrying) with no concern for the impending judgment. Although the warnings have been replete, the receptivity to these warnings fall on deaf ears, as in the days of Noah. As a result, Jesus' coming will be a surprise to many, just as a thief in the night comes as a surprise to those who live in false security. Jesus' return will shock people who are with others who are snatched away in the middle of their daily activities. First Thessalonians 4:17 describes this event, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." Jesus' followers will be safe with Him, but those who are not under Jesus' saving protection will be left to face God's wrath on their own merit. Human works, even the best of efforts, are not enough to create a safe position in light of this impending judgment. Only the merit of Christ and being found in Him will protect us from being swept away in judgment.

What does the teaching in the Olivet Discourse mean to us today? First, we must believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ in order to escape God's coming judgment. Even though we have been warned we must also be prepared by seeking God while it's still possible. Second, God calls us to instruct others so that they also find salvation through the only means possible, faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). If we accept God's offer of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus we can have comfort that God will spare us from the tribulation period coming upon the earth (Luke 21:36, 1 Thessalonians 5:9). In addition, we become people of eternity, living for another world and we find that this world is not our home. This changes our daily life because it redefines our value system and priorities. Finally, we must allow God to place us into situations that require us to trust more in God.

Saint Paul said, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

Reflection Questions

1. Review the following insights from the Bible passages for this week:

a. The passage from Isaiah predicted that people of all nations would seek the God of the Bible, wanting to learn His ways and walk in His paths. Are you evidence of this prophecy? Are there others in your life that God may be asking you to influence towards this Him?

b. The second reading encouraged the people of God to be motivated by love, walking as children of the light who reject patterns of darkness. Are there deeds of the darkness that you need to put away and reject? Are there aspects to putting on the armor of light (like Bible study, prayer, fellowship) that you can give yourself to more fervently so that you have the mind of Christ?

c. The third reading typified the followers of Jesus as those who are prepared for His return. As you look at your life, what evidence do you see of your preparedness for His return? How does preparedness get translated into your daily perspective and choices?

Which parts of these messages would help give you resolve and encouragement to live with an eternal perspective for the hard decisions in your life?

2. Whether Christ returns in our lifetime or not, why would it be wise to surrender your life to Him and His will on a daily basis? What have you learned about the future and God's heart for you that helps you to live for Christ, as opposed to just seeking Christ for "fire insurance?"

For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass visit: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/ Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-22-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **11-22-2015**. This week we will see the rulership of Jesus from three different angles in the readings from the Mass. The first reading is an Old Testament prophecy about His dominion and kingdom being an everlasting establishment. The second reading, from the book of Revelation in the New Testament, confirms the eternal dominion and power that Jesus has, but also adds a sense of personal tenderness towards us who believe in Him. The last reading, from the Gospel of John, chronicles the self-revelation of Jesus as King, recognizing that His kingdom was not of this world. Although his kingship was misunderstood and missed by many in His first advent, it will not be misunderstood at His second advent.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Daniel Chapter 7. The first six chapters of the Book record mostly historical events with some prophecy. However, as we move into chapter seven, Daniel records visions given to him from God concerning future events. These prophetic messages were given to Daniel by God during various times during his life. The context of Chapter 7 was a message given to Daniel "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" (Daniel 7:1), meaning it was before the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by the Medo Persian forces under Cyrus the Great. There is some debate as to the identity of Belshazzar, who was most likely an overlord that reigned under the authority of the King. In examining historical sources it is also likely that Belshazzar was either the son or grandson of the famous King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's visions in the first 12 verses of

chapter 7 are of four successive empires beginning with Babylon depicted by a lion (v 4). The second is Medo / Persia depicted by a bear. The third is the Greek Empire pictured by a leopard, King Alexander, with four wings picturing his four generals to whom his kingdom was divided after his fast and furious life. Finally, the last empire is a "dreadful and terrible beast" depicting both the Roman Empire in the shorter term and in the long term a restored Roman-like empire corresponding to Babylon the Great in the Book of Revelation. Daniel said about this one, "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns" (Daniel 7:7). Another ruler called the "little horn" (v. 8) will arise from among the last empire with a "mouth uttering great boasts" (v. 8f). This "little horn" was prefigured by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes who tormented the Jews in the third century BC as recorded in the book of 1 Maccabees. This "antichrist of the Old Testament" is a type of the person that will exist during the end times. This is the person spoken of in Revelation 13:2 – 10 with language very similar to that of the Prophet Daniel.

This introduction brings us to today's reading in which we see a vision in heaven that pictures the kingdom of Jesus being presented to Him by God the Father. At the end of the age after four world empires have controlled the world with the last one devouring the ones that came before it, God will finally claim the kingdom that is rightfully His after putting down the evil rulers that had come before.

First Reading:

Daniel 7:13-14 NAS95 13 "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

Daniel clearly saw a revelation of the Lord Jesus Who was to come, as Jesus used this same terminology in referring to Himself in Matthew 24:30, "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." Jesus also called Himself the Son of Man in John 5:27. When Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth, "His dominion [will be] everlasting . . . [and] one which will not be destroyed."

From this passage in Daniel we find out a few very important details about the future that should inform us for our lives today. The first detail is the description of Jesus as the Son of Man. This was Jesus' most common way of referring to himself as recorded in the Gospels. Why would He describe Himself as such (and not choose Son of God as His preferred self-reference)? It may be that He knew we would be able to revere Him as the divine Son of God, but realized that we may have trouble picturing Him as a man. Jesus' identity as fully God and fully man is a mystery to us, but is

nonetheless important. As the second Adam, He fulfilled (as a man) the righteous requirements of the law (Romans 8:3-4), what the first Adam could not do. And in that, He provides salvation for us if we unite ourselves with Him. A second key point, is that Jesus is given dominion, glory and a kingdom for all people to serve Him. If this is the case for eternity (and this is good for us in the future), then our servanthood to Jesus the King should be good for us today. Some people agonize over the "sacrifice" it is to be a Christian. Well, really, the sacrifice is only toward the self-ruled life, which is destructive to our soul anyways. In reality, Jesus' is a good King, so when we let Him rule in our life each day, we are living the life we were designed to live. Jesus said that He came to bring life and that more abundantly (John 10:10). Can we trust Him to do this in us even now?

In these days of chaos before Jesus returns, we can look with confident hope that one day Jesus will return to set up His perfect kingdom on earth in fulfillment of this promise in Daniel. Jesus will take the dominion and kingdom back from Satan that was given to him for a short time (2 Corinthians 4:4), in light of eternity. As we encounter disturbing events in our world today, we can live with an eternal perspective which banks on the fact that God wins.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The reading is from the Book of Revelation. The context of the reading is the beginning of the Book, in which John introduces Jesus as the rightful Ruler of the earth in very similar language to what we just read from Daniel.

Second Reading:

Revelation 1:5-8 NAS95 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood– 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father–to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

In the reading we see John's testimony about the identity of Jesus as "the faithful witness" (one who tells the truth and who's words are reliable, John 18:37); "firstborn of the dead" (the first and preeminent of all those who will rise from the dead, Romans 8:29); "ruler of the kings of the earth" (the highest power); the One "who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood" (He created a way for us to be made free from the slavery of sin and death by His great love, Romans 6:1-23); and Who "made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (His goal is to make His followers into a united people group who serves God the Father with our lives) (vv. 5 – 6). In verse 7 we see the return of the Lord Jesus as we read in Daniel, the One Who will come in the clouds to fulfill the prophecy given by the angels in Acts 1:11 regarding how Jesus would return where they said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

Furthermore, John quoted from an important prophecy of Zechariah which predicted the ultimate acceptance of Jesus by His people the Jews. Zechariah predicted the events regarding Jesus return: "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10). Finally, John describes Jesus as the first and last, the "Alpha and Omega," a statement which forms a bookend in the Book of Revelation where it is repeated in the closing section in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. This is a way of saying that Jesus is A to Z and everything in between. He is everything we need.

We can be confident that one day Jesus will return to establish His rightful place on earth as the Ruler of the universe. He released us from our sins by His blood—a great sacrifice on His part. What a wonderful Savior. May we live in the freedom He has granted us, giving our lives back to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint John chapter 18. The context is just after Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested in the garden across from the Kidron Valley (John 13:1). Jesus was bound and led first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest that year (John 18:13). Annas was the one who had prophesied that it would be better for one man to die than for the rest of the nation to perish (John 18:14). Jesus was interrogated by Annas, with Peter following at a distance (vv. 15-17). Next, Jesus was led to Caiaphas the high priest (v. 24), then finally into the Praetorium where He appeared before Pontius Pilate. While Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish rulers, Pilate was the Roman ruler, who could sentence a prisoner to death.

Gospel Reading:

John 18:33-37 NAS95 33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

In the reading Jesus affirmed His rightful rulership of the world, although He had not yet established His kingdom on earth as it already was so in heaven. Jesus' kingdom was at this time a kingdom not on earth, but rather one in the hearts of the people who believed. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (v. 37). The subjects of His kingdom are those who come to Him in faith who follow His truth. As we see in 1 John, "We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure

our heart before Him" (1 John 3:19). Just as Jesus' rulership and kingdom were mocked and discarded, we as His followers face similar persecution because of our belief in Him. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We must learn how to live in the tension of the now as we wait for the "not yet"—our future with Him. The fact that He endured the mistreatment of those in power gives us hope and strength to endure the mistreatment of the world as it mocks and marginalizes the Gospel message. These are opportunities to walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) and be a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20), thus showing the veracity of Christ's rulership in our lives.

What does this mean for us today? The readings today have shown us that Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega, the rightful ruler of the universe. One day He will return to His rightful place to rule and reign on the earth. Until then we can trust in the promise of His return and look forward to the salvation of our souls. Second, we can trust that once we believe in the Lord Jesus for our salvation and not in any "good" works that we do (Ephesians 2:8-9) we can have assurance that we have eternal life. God tells us that if we believe, then we can presume that we have eternal life. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Finally, we as we continue to study and understand the prophecies about Jesus' return, we can begin to see the events of the world taking shape as Jesus' coming becomes more imminent. These events should not cause us alarm but rather give motivation to expand our ministry efforts to reach lost people with the saving message of the Gospel.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. There were several descriptions of Jesus that were shared in the Mass passages this week. Take some time and reflect on one or two from the list below and make a connection between the description and how that can impact your perspective:

- Ruler of an everlasting Kingdom
- Son of Man
- Faithful witness
- First born of the dead
- Ruler of the kings of the earth
- The one who loves us and released us from sin by his blood
- The one who made us to be a kingdom
- The one who made us to be priests, to serve God
- The one who was pierced
- The Alpha and Omega
- The one who is and was and is to come
- The King of the Jews
- The one who's kingdom is not of this world, but of another realm

2. If Jesus is King, how is His kingship displayed in your life? Are there ways that you are intentionally surrendering your self-rule in order to be ruled by Him? What areas does His kingship

make sense in your life and motivate you to order your life around His values and priorities? Take time to reaffirm your desire to see Jesus' will override your self-will. What areas of your life need to be surrendered to His kingship? Take time to confess these areas of resistance to His rightful reign and ask Him to help you surrender, even in these war zones.

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/112215.cfm

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-15-2015



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **11-15-2015**. This week we open with a reading from Daniel 12 in which we study the combined event known as the rapture of the church, the return of

the Lord, and the resurrection of the dead. Then we examine in the second reading how Jesus died for our sins once and for all, which is so much superior than the sacrificial system described in the Old Testament that had to be repeated twice a day and never took away the people's sins. Finally we close with another view of the same event described in the first reading from Jesus' message known as the Olivet Discourse.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Prophet Daniel, chapter 12. The context of the message is a prophecy about the end of the world as we know it when the man of sin, known as the Antichrist, rules the world. The Antichrist will be in power when God pours out His final judgments on the earth and Jesus returns to reign on earth. The reading today describes the resurrection of the dead, some of whom go to eternal life with God and others go to eternal damnation. Jesus said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

The reading from Daniel promises that the people of God will be "rescued" from this time of unprecedented distress. In the New Testament, we have further corroboration of this, which Saint Paul calls the "rapture," where the Lord Jesus comes to take His church to heaven before God pours the judgments chronicled in the Book of Revelation (see especially Revelation 16:1, the "seven bowls of the wrath of God"). We will read more about this later in the Gospel lesson regarding the "Day of the Lord's judgment" (1 Thessalonians 5:2), a very dark time for those left on the earth after Jesus' return for His church. The "catching up" of the church to heaven was predicted by Saint Paul in response to someone in Thessalonica who had been teaching the false doctrine that the Lord had already returned (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Here Paul introduced the concept that the church would be taken up into the air along with church saints who had already died (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) as follows. "*15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*" Paul reassured the believers that the Lord's return will be very obvious and recognizable. No one will "miss it." This corresponds to the teaching in Daniel 12, which is the focus of the first reading.

First Reading:

Daniel 12:1-3 NAS95 1 "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who have insight will shine brightly

like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

The reading opens with the phrase, "Now at that time" (v. 1a). The previous verses in Daniel 11, chronicle a time of wars and violence that will consume the earth. This will bring in a "time of distress" that is referred to later in the verse. Michael, one of only two angels mentioned by name in the Bible who follow God, will somehow superintend the activity during this time. As we said in previous studies, the time leading up to this event will be a time of increasing and terrible persecution of God's people. Although a small remnant of Jews will be divinely sealed for God's protection throughout this time (Revelation 7:4-8), the Antichrist will pursue Christians with great vengeance just before the Lord returns and "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt" (v. 2). Saint John said in Revelation, "So the dragon was enraged with the woman (Israel), and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Christians)" (Revelation 12:17 with parenthetical explanations added). Verse two says that "many" will rise, meaning not everyone, but many people have yet to die on the earth. The exception to this is that the believers who are alive at that time will be taken up to be with the Lord. "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord*" (1Th 4:16-17).

During this time "everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued." What is this book? The book that Daniel refers to is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Philippians 4:3 says that people who labored by Paul's side had their names written in the book of life. Revelation 3:5 shares a promise to those who overcome, that their names will not be blotted out of the book of life. Revelation 20:12 describes two books, one that has all the deeds of every person (implying judgment for misdeeds) and another book, the book of life, which if one's name is written there, will cancel out the judgment recorded in the other book. Revelation 20:15 says: "And if anyone's name was not found in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Revelation 21:27 describes it as the Lamb's book of life and says that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter the New Jerusalem, God's eternal heaven. The Bible makes it very clear that the book of life is a place that records those who are going to be saved from the eternal lake of fire, the just consequences for those who live contrary to God and apart from His life. How does one know if his or her name is written in the book of life? Another way to ask the same question based on the passage in Daniel: how can we know which group we are in, the ones who will rise to everlasting life or those who rise to disgrace and everlasting contempt? Once we recognize that we are a sinner, "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), we can turn our hearts to the Lord Jesus as the only remedy. The Bible tells us that "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1a), and later John said, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 5:12). Further it says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have

eternal life" (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). Salvation is a free gift that comes about **only** by belief in Jesus Christ, it can never be earned. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). If you have put your faith in Jesus to save you, then you can have assurance that you will be "rescued" from eternal disgrace and contempt.

Daniel also explains that the people "who have insight" and who "lead the many to righteousness" will be prominent in the eternal kingdom of God, shining brightly "like the stars forever and ever" (v. 3c). Being involved in gaining wisdom and pointing others to deeper faith in Christ is a valuable focus for our lives. You may have a ministry of evangelism, introducing people to a relationship with Jesus. Or you may have a ministry of discipleship, helping those who have put their faith in Jesus grow in their new life in Christ. Either way, it is important to continue growing in your own faith to have insight and to be equipped to lead others to righteousness.

Interestingly, God gave us a glimpse into a precursor to the resurrection of the dead which happened at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. He is the only one of the four writers that recorded this event. Matthew said that after Jesus had given up His life on the cross, "The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:52-53). This is one example of how powerful God is and is evidence of the deity of Christ.

What does this reading mean for us today? First, if anyone is sitting on the fence regarding Jesus as Lord, today is the day to trust in Him. Saint Paul said, "*AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION*" (2 Corinthians 6:2). As Peter told the people in Jerusalem about Jesus, "*He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). Second, although we as Christians should expect increasing persecution leading up to Jesus' return, we can take hope that Jesus will fulfill His promise to return "in the same way in which [they] saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Finally, we can have confidence in the fact that God's mighty angelic beings are fighting the spiritual battle against the demonic forces allied against us.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This reading is from Hebrews chapter 10, a treatise on how Jesus died one time for sins forever, which means this sacrifice can never be repeated. At this time, the Hebrew people were still conducting the Old Testament sacrifices required by the Law. Throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer provides a running contrast to the old manner of things compared to Jesus. The verdict is that Jesus is greater than angels, greater than Moses, and greater than the sacrificial system. In this reading, we see a culminating point of the author's conclusion that Jesus is greater than the priestly system of the Old Testament.

Second Reading:

Note: Verses 15 – 16 which were omitted from the reading were included below.

Hebrews 10:11-18 NAS95 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The author said that by "one offering He has perfected [forever] those who are sanctified" (v. 14). The word once follows a string of uses of this same word that first appears in this context in chapter 7: "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:26-27). To make his point that Jesus died once for sins forever, in contrast to the sacrifices offered repeatedly by the Levitical priests, the author continued repeating this word four more times before today's reading, and twice more in the actual reading. The author presented extremely compelling evidence as to the importance of understanding the concept of Jesus' single sacrifice for sins forever. He said, "[H]aving offered one sacrifice for sins for all time," (v. 12) then again he said in verse 14, "For by one offering." Interestingly the phrase indicating Jesus' single sacrifice is repeated seven times between the end of chapter seven and today's reading in chapter 10. Anytime the Bible repeats something we need to pay special attention to it, and especially if the concept is repeated seven times! The reading clearly tells us, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin" (v. 18). The only thing that can take away our sin is Jesus willingly sacrificing His life as a Victor on the cross for our sins (see John 10:18).

What does this mean for our life? The value of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is of inestimable value. Compared with the sacrificial system of the Jews about which God said "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin" (Hebrews 10:4), Jesus' single sacrificial giving of Himself as a Victor on the cross provided the means for believers in Him to be reconciled to God forever. Jesus will never have to offer Himself as a sacrifice again, ever. When we celebrate communion we look back at His finished work on the cross. This was always God's plan, as Jesus was the "Lamb slain since before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). When we break the bread of communion and drink from the cup, we remember the body that he allowed to be broken for us and His blood poured out as the final offering for sin forever (1 Corinthians 11:26). We do not need to work for our

salvation, for Jesus' work on the cross is finished (John 19:30). I'll end this with one last exclamation point, for Jesus has "appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself"(Hebrews 9:26)! What a wonderful savior!

As we move onto the Gospel lesson, we will return to eschatology (pronounced es·ka·tol·a·gee), a word that means the study of the last things. The events in the reading will sound very familiar from your study in the first reading.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel lesson from Mark 13 is from Jesus' message known as the Olivet Discourse. The parallel passage in Matthew 24 goes into some greater details than that of Mark's account. The context of the message is after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His cleansing of the temple from the money changers during the preparation for the Passover. Upon the disciples telling Jesus about the "wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings" (Mark 13:1) of the temple complex, Jesus told them, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down" (verse 2). Afterwards Peter, James, John and Andrew approached Jesus privately and asked Him, "when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled" (v. 4). Jesus then explained to them what was to come, including many deceivers (Matthew 13:6), "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 13:7), famines and earthquakes (Matthew 13:8), yet these were just the beginning of the times of the end (v. 8). Then would come persecution (Matthew 13:9, 11), including death (v. 12), and the spread of the Gospel to the extent of the known world (v. 10, with final fulfillment in Revelation 14:6). After the "beginning of the birth pains" (v. 8e), the Antichrist will be revealed and bring an end to the restored sacrificial system in Jerusalem (Matthew 13:14). Although this prophecy was partially fulfilled by the Roman general Titus during the siege of Jerusalem during AD 70, the text is clear that another siege is in sight since Jesus warning is a global one, not just a local one concerning the city of Jerusalem. He said, "if the Lord had not cut short the days no human being would be saved" (v. 20). This and the corresponding testimony in the Book of Revelation make it clear that these events are yet future. This brings us up to today's reading which details events which begin after or during the unveiling of the first six seals in the Book of Revelation. The "gathering of the elect" (v. 27) about which we will read is the same event that we studied in the first reading from Daniel 12.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 13:24-32 NAS95 24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, 25 AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. 27 And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven. 28 Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I say to you, this

generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. 32 But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."

The opening verse of the reading is nearly the same as what John described with the opening of the sixth seal in the Book of Revelation. "*12 I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. 14 The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places*" (Revelation 6:12-14). In the time just prior to the return of the Lord Jesus, the world will experience miraculous cosmic signs revealing God's power (vv. 24 – 25). At some point during the mid-point of a seven year period counting from a peace treaty made with Jerusalem to settle the worldwide chaos surrounding control over that tiny but religiously important region, Jesus Christ "will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds" (v. 27). While there is much speculation about the sequence of events, this is the event we discussed in the first reading that, in my opinion, includes the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50–54), the return of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:11), and the resurrection of the dead up until that time (Daniel 12:2, John 5:28-29). Beyond this point the period known as the Great Tribulation or the Day of the Lord will commence during which God will bring an end to the Antichrist's religious and commercial systems of mystery Babylon and Babylon the Great (Revelation 18). Although we don't yet understand what form this Babylon will take, we know that it will exalt itself against God much in the same way as the people did with the building of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

As the reading continued, Jesus explained to His disciples how to discern the signs of the times by telling them the parable of the fig tree. In the same way that they could discern the ripeness of the fig tree and that the summer was near they would also be able to discern that the end times were at their doorstep when the signs He gave them were at hand. He told them that once people (not necessarily them) saw these signs that the current generation would see the whole process completed during their lifetime (v. 30). Finally, through the mystery of the functions of the Three Persons of the Godhead, Jesus explained that the timing of the events was known only to God the Father (v. 32).

What does all of this talk about the horrible events of the end times mean to us today? Jesus calls us to live with an expectation of His imminent return. We are to be good stewards of the gifts that He has given to us. He said in Matthew's retelling of the Olivet Discourse, "*For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes*" (Matthew 24:44-46). We too must learn to discern the times by studying the imminent signs that will precede the return of the Lord, as you did today. Although the study of the end times may seem daunting, the Bible lays out a clear pattern of events that people alive during that time should expect to see. As time marches closer and closer to the fulfillment of these events, we should expect to see

the "beginning of birth pains" described in Mark 13:8. We must expect to be persecuted on an increasing level for our faith, even to the point of death. The point of Jesus' teaching about His imminent return was to provide us with comfort that He is not far away, and He will return soon in fulfillment of His promises to us and to Israel. Saint Paul said, "Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18) regarding the catching up of the church to heaven.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What do you find comforting about the words from the first and third readings? How can you encourage and challenge others with your faith in Jesus' imminent return?

2. When you think about the fact that Jesus has paid fully for your sin debt, what inner response does this evoke? What outer response seems fitting for you to reflect this reality in your life this week? How can you live in light of this reality?

Readings for the Week

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http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/111515.cfm

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 11-1-2015

Study Notes for the Sunday Mass Published by Christians for Christ Ministries. We are a non-denominational Christian ministry that seeks to encourage and facilitate Christians in studying the Holy Scriptures. **"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus."** 1 Timothy 2:5



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **11-1-2015**. This week we open with a reading from the mysterious Book of Revelation where we will explain in detail some of the background and context to bring out the meaning of the text. Then we move to another reading written by John from the Book of First John. Then we close with the Gospel lesson from Saint Matthew from the section called the Beatitudes. I remember reading those passages many years ago in Mass and feeling that I needed to be a better person and to try harder to please God. Find out what God's Word says about my feelings and what would have been a more biblical response to them.

I know someone that has been a Christian for a very long time while a certain uncle of hers was resistant to believing in Jesus Christ right up until near the end of his life. As he grew older, he steadfastly refused to bow his knee to Jesus Christ although almost everyone around him were followers of Jesus including his niece who told me the story, and her husband was a pastor. One night he went to bed expecting to awaken the next morning just like every other day. However, God had a different plan for him. As I was a new believer in Jesus Christ myself when I heard this story I remember how it profoundly impacted me as I listened with baited breath about what was going to happen next. The next morning when the man arose and looked at himself in the mirror, he found a depression in the bone of his forehead in the shape of a cross. He instantly recognized this as a miracle as a seal of God calling him to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ which he quickly obeyed. As others encountered him throughout the last years of his life, he testified of God's grace in marking him in this unique way such that he could no longer deny the one and only Savior Jesus Christ. This marking remained on his forehead for the rest of his life as a seal or marking of him as a follower of Jesus Christ. This week we will read about how God will in some future day "seal" a group of Jews in order to protect them from the wrath of the Antichrist who like many others before him will persecute God's chosen people.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from the Book of Revelation. This Book tells the story of the unfurling of a series of judgments upon the world culminating with what the Old Testament calls the "Day of the Lord." Throughout the Book, John moves his focus back and forth from events happening upon the earth and those in heaven with frequent parenthesis (or pauses) in the chronological progression of events. Understanding of Revelation requires a thorough understanding of the Old Testament and especially the Book of Daniel. John uses much symbolic language throughout the Book, and the reader is challenged to understand the meaning behind the symbols as well as to what extent the language is meant to foretell literal events in heaven and on the earth.

In order to understand the Book of Revelation and today's reading, it is necessary to understand from a high level the primary events that will transpire during the end times. The order of the main events that will unfold are as follows. The sin of the world will grow worse and worse (Matthew 24;12), and many false christs will come. (2 Timothy 3:13, Matthew 24:5). The world will be consumed by "wars and rumors of wars," there will be "famines and earthquakes" (Matthew 24:6-7). This will mark the beginning of the end times. (Matthew 24:8) The AntiChrist will come on the scene and falsely claim to have been resurrected from the dead (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Revelation 13:3). A peace treaty will be made with Israel providing for resumption of animal sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (Daniel 9:27). Large-scale persecution of believers will escalate leading many false believers to fall away (Revelation 13:7, Matthew 13:9-10). This point marks the unfurling of the scroll of the first six seals of Revelation. As the AntiChrist rules the world with terror, at some point the believers in God will be reunited with Christ and taken to heaven at His second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18). Somewhere during this time a group of elect Jews will be protected by God as described in today's reading. The final stage will then begin with the unbelieving world left behind and then God will unleash His judgments during the final "Day of the Lord" completing the total destruction of the AntiChrist's worldly and religious empire of mystery Babylon. This is the time when God unleashes His judgments upon the world as stated just prior to today's reading in Revelation 6:17, "for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand." At the conclusion of these events, Jesus will return to set up His reign on earth.

The particular context of today's reading in chapter 7 is the divine protection of a believing remnant of Jews alive during the time when the AntiChrist will be unleashing increasing persecution upon believers in God. God will protect this surviving remnant in order to complete His promises to them.

First Reading:

Note: Verses 5 – 8 which were omitted from the reading have been included below.

Revelation 7:2-14 NAS95 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who

were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed. 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

In the days before Jesus' return (see Acts 1:11), a powerful world ruler will emerge called the AntiChrist who will persecute any believers alive during this time including both Christians and Jews. As the AntiChrist hurls his bloodshed upon the Christians, God will protect a remnant of the Jews who through this terrible persecution will come to faith in the Lord Jesus (Zechariah 12:10). To do this God grants His authority to an angel to set His mark upon this group of Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel – except that some of them were designated by different names because of the curses pronounced in the Old Testament. (Astute readers can find out more information about this by studying Deuteronomy 29:16-10). In ancient days, the kings used their signet ring to emboss a special marking into wax or clays seals that were placed upon documents in order to show their sign of authority and authenticity. In the last days of the devils reign over his current world empire, the angel of God's divine marking provides protection to the believing Jews from the wrath of the AntiChrist. The Prophet Malachi said about this, "I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:17). Whether this is a literal number of people or it is symbolic of a large but finite number isn't readily discernible in the text. However, they will have been regathered for the opening of the rebuilt temple and the resumption of the sacrifices. During the first three and half years of the peace treaty that the AntiChrist makes with national Israel, the Jews will resume their sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem while large scale persecution of Christians accelerates around the world. As time moves to the midpoint of this treaty, the AntiChrist will set an image of himself up in the temple and command his worship as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This "abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15) will greatly provoke the Jews to rebel against the AntiChrist to such an extent that without God's divine protection all of them would be consumed by this evil end time ruler. It is only through this horrific series of events that unfold upon the earth that the collective group of the Jews will finally recognize Jesus Whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10) as their Messiah.

As the reading continues, beginning in verse 9 John changed his focus from events happening on

earth to things occurring in heaven. This is one of the frequent parenthesis that occurs throughout the Book. John saw a second group of people, a "great multitude which no one could count," (v. 9) who are believing people martyred up until that point during the great tribulation. John didn't understand who these people were at first, but the angel answered his question about them by describing how they "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v. 14). It's not often when someone can wash their robes in blood and make them white, but that is exactly what Jesus offers to anyone who trusts in Him. Although the believers in heaven were not delivered **from** the tribulation and persecution on earth, they were delivered **through** it to be with Jesus in heaven.

What does this mean for us today? We as Christians must expect that as God's prophets we will increasingly face persecution. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Later in the Gospel reading we will see how Jesus likened the persecution of believers to the persecution of the prophets that came before them (Matthew 5:12). There Jesus said, "Blessed are you when others revile against you and persecute you." As God's persecuted prophets we can look for our fulfillment not in the things of the world but look heavenward towards our ultimate purpose in serving God. Finally, as we continue to march onwards towards the last days described in Revelation, we can expect to see a growing distinction between the true people of God and the rest of the world. The Prophet Malachi said about these days, "Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him" (Malachi 3:18). Although we may not be saved from tribulation, we can be assured that God will deliver us through it.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading is from First John. The context is Saint John's teaching on the characteristics of true believers, something that we will encounter later in the Gospel lesson.

Second Reading:

1 John 3:1-3 NAS95 1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

John said that God has so loved love those that believe in Him that He calls them His children (v. 1). Nonbelievers do not understand believers because they cannot know God and didn't know His Son Jesus (v. 1d-ff). During our mortal lives as believers, we do not yet understand what we will become when we either get to heaven or meet Jesus when he returns to regather His church as we talked about in the first reading (v. 2). When we do finally meet Jesus our eyes will be opened, and we will see Him for what He truly is without the veil of sin covering our minds. Finally, we have hope that God will bring these things about. While living with an eternal focus as true believers we strive to

become more and more like Jesus by leaning upon God's power that He has placed within us. As we become more pure by maturing in our walk with Jesus, we become more like the true believers described by John in the reading. This provides an excellent lead-in to the Gospel lesson in which Jesus lists some of the qualities of people whose lives have been transformed by God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The Gospel reading is from Saint Matthew in the section known as the Sermon on the Mount because of the location from which Jesus addressed the crowd in Galilee. The context is at the beginning of Jesus' ministry just after His temptation in the desert for forty days and the calling of the first disciples including Peter, Andrew, James and John. Jesus was beginning to draw large crowds and was telling the people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). This is the beginning of a much longer discourse that spans Matthew Chapters 5 through 7.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 5:1-12 NAS95 1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In this reading, Jesus announced a total of nine blessings, each opening with "Blessed are." Jesus is fulfilling the role of Prophet by providing a series of blessings, a word which means "happy." This contrasts with the usual words given by the Old Testament prophets who announced a series of curses and woes against those who refused to follow God. Jesus came to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and this is what the kingdom looks like. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of new things that people have to do in order to be right with God, but rather it is a list of defining qualities of people who have been transformed by God.

Jesus is redefining the blessed life. Think about how these traits contrast how the world defines blessing. Someone living the blessed life:

1. Is poor in spirit, meaning humble which leads a person to recognize their spiritual need for God.
2. Mourns, meaning they recognize that this world is not their home and looks to God for comfort.
3. Exhibits gentleness, meaning they don't have to be aggressive to get things done because their

heart is established in Christ's power.
4. Hungers and thirsts for righteousness meaning they prioritize eternal things over finite satisfaction in the world.
5. Shows mercy, because they were offered mercy themselves through the forgiveness given them by God and can extend it to others.
6. Is pure in heart, meaning they are not entangled with the evil ways of the world including lying, deceiving and manipulating people in order to get their own way.
7. Is a peacemaker, not just someone who tries to keep the peace at all costs. They actively seek peaceful solutions even in difficult situations which forces them to rely upon God more deeply.
8. Endures persecution with a vision toward eternity knowing that it is better to suffer than to succumb to temptation to compromise.
9. Endures insult because of their proclamation of truth (Word of God) just like happened to the prophets.

In summary, Jesus raised the bar of understanding to show the people that righteousness was not a bunch of behaviors that came by trying harder, but rather were qualities of the heart that were only possible through God's transforming power. These nine traits are the result of being born from above (John 3:3). Instead of being depressed that we can never be this good, Jesus delivered this sermon in order to invite us into a new way of life. This new way of life recognizes that our self-righteousness is as filthy rags before the LORD (Isaiah 64:6). We must come to the place where we receive Christ's righteousness into our hearts as a substitute for our former way of life (Romans 3:21-22).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. How do you respond internally when you read the Sermon on the Mount? Does it feel like another list of impossible feats that you must accomplish in order to win God's favor? Or, have you responded to Jesus' invitation to life in the kingdom (where He is the King of your heart), and the Sermon on the Mount is a reflection of the work that He is doing in your life? If your response is more the former, that this is another list of impossible feats, you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to give you His life from above and so be born anew.

2. In the first reading we read about how God appointed an angel to "seal" a group of Jews during the end times in order to protect them from the events that were going to unfold as described in the seven seals of Revelation. In what ways are you already "sealed" by God through your faith in Jesus Christ?

Readings for the Week

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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An Examination of the Escatolical View of Scripture Emerging from Hanegraaf and Brouwer's First Book in the Last Disciple Series



AN EXAMINATION OF THE ESCATOLOGICAL VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

EMERGING FROM HANEGRAAFF AND BROUWER'S FIRST BOOK

IN THE *LAST DISCIPLE* SERIES

BY JIM HILL

The Last Disciple (hereafter *LD*) is a fictional novel set in the Roman Empire during the reign of Nero. The main character is Vitas, a trusted advisor of Nero that attempts to curb this beast's maniacal excesses and save Christians from torture and execution. The plot is complex and follows Vitas as he journeys to Jerusalem to report on the governor Florus who has been persecuting Jews and Christians alike. During the adventure, Vitas becomes engaged to a former slave girl named Sophia who is a Christian. Eventually they meet up with John the Revelator who is being held in prison. The book is exciting but requires attention to details since this first book in the series spends an extensive amount of time building the characters for future books.

The thesis of this paper is the degree to which we can affirm the partial preterist position that

emerges from Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer's first book in their eschatologically themed series. Specifically, what are the main eschatological themes in the book? Second, did John mean for us to refer to the first-century Roman ruler Nero in the book of Revelation when he spoke of the beast? Finally, can we interpret many of the events in the Olivet Discourse as having already found their fulfillment during Nero's persecution of Christians during the middle part of the first century? Hanegraaff stated in the afterward of his book that the theology in the series was predicated by a term that he invented called "exegetical eschatology."[1] The thesis therefore is the extent to which this eschatological perspective is theologically palatable as it develops within the *Last Disciple* and from other statements made by Hanegraaff.

The word *preterism* came from the Latin words *praeter* meaning "beyond," and *ire* which means "go." This eschatological view has interpreted certain OT and NT biblical prophesies as having already been fulfilled. Toussaint quoted Ice as indicating three forms of this theology, including mild, moderate, and extreme. Followers of the extreme form teach have taught that all biblical prophesy has been fulfilled and the Lord Jesus has already returned. Teachers of the moderate form have held that most Bible prophesies have been fulfilled except for the second coming of Jesus. Adherents of the mild form of preterism have held that the Tribulation spoken of in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation was fulfilled through the judgment of the Jews in 70 C.E. or Rome in 313 C.E.[2] It was this mild form of what we call partial preterism that was the subject of this treatise.

Tyndale released *The Last Disciple* in late 2004 in response to Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' highly successful *Left Behind* series. *Time* magazine interviewed Hank Hanegraaff when this first book was being released who said, "There is a lot of hysteria because of the *Left Behind* books." He continued, "The *Left Behind* books are part of a trend toward sensationalism and 'script torture' of the Bible."[3] Several recent events ignited this battling of end-times authors. First was the 1996 release of the *Left Behind* book and subsequent series by LaHaye and Jenkins. Second was the callous acceptance by many evangelicals to Jenkins' series. Many of the callers to Hanegraaff's *Bible Answer Man* program did not seem to be willing to rethink any of their eschatological view. A third factor in the debate was pregnant pause that ensued as Christian radio listeners waited for the

release of Hanegraaff's own position on eschatology. Hank made many critical comments about Jenkins' book on his radio program. Whenever callers would ask for Hank's position, his response was to tell them to wait for his book. His main complaint was that many callers blindly followed the futurist, pre-millennial view like a pied piper. Listeners to the program weren't surprised when Hank released his book series with a different theological bent coauthored with novelist Sigmund Brouwer. After Tyndale released this first book in the fictional series in 2004, the second one entitled *The Last Sacrifice* followed in 2005.

Primary Theological Issues in *The Last Disciple*

Eschatology is a vast and complex subject. If we were to examine all of the theological issues that emerged from the *LD* we would be doing so right up until "the Lord himself (comes) down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God" (1 Thess 4:16). [4] Because of this complexity, we have narrowed the scope of this paper to the events in the Olivet Discourse with a brief reference to events mentioned in Revelation. Yet the interrelatedness of the material requires that we examine at least some of the main theological themes in the book. These are seemingly without number, but the main ones are as follows.

First, the *LD* is an outright rejection of the futurist view of eschatology. It espouses a partial preterist view regardless of what Hanegraaff says otherwise. This doesn't mean that we accuse Hanegraaff of an unorthodox Christian view. Adams provided an excellent treatise on the different between what he called an "orthodox preterists" and an "unorthodox preterists." Although theology is usually done in shades of gray, this debate on orthodoxy revolves around the heart of the Gospel, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unorthodox preterist denies the second coming of Christ, saying that Jesus came spiritually in 70 C.E. They also deny the resurrection of the dead and relegate this to a spiritual sense.[5] Hanegraaff follows the orthodox view and doesn't in any way deny either the second coming of Christ or the resurrection of the dead. Even though Hank has rejected the prevailing eschatological view, his position isn't unorthodox in any fashion. We should discuss his beliefs with gentleness and respect as he likes to say on his program.

Second, the premise of *LD* almost entirely hinges upon an early dating of Revelation, before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. The thesis of the book is based upon this early dating of both Revelation and the entire NT. In his second book, Hank questions how John could have written Revelation and not mentioned that the temple had been destroyed. He said, "The point of all this is that if Revelation was written before AD 70, then it is reasonable to assume that the vision given to John was meant to reveal the apocalyptic events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem—events that were still in John's future but that are in our past." Hank went on to say, "First, it is instructive to note that the late dating for Revelation is largely dependent on a single—markedly ambiguous—sentence in the writings of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons." He gave one single reason for rejecting the late dating (95 C.E.) of Revelation. [6] Geisler stated regarding the eschatology in the *LD* book, "There is strong evidence that Revelation was written in the 90s well after Nero was dead during Domitian's reign. If so, this would make the LD false." Geisler gave no less than ten reasons for the late dating of Revelation.[7] It is evident from history that Nero was a monster. However, the text of Revelation seems to indicate that the beast mentioned there is connected to a later Roman figure or the nation as a whole. The first time that the beast appears is in Rev 11:7. The context of this passage is during the close of ministry of the two witnesses who are then overcome by the beast that came up from the abyss and killed them. Neither history or Scripture record the ministry of these two individuals during the timeframe of Nero. The beast could be prefigured by Nero, but certainly wasn't fulfilled by him.

Geisler continued to refocus the likely setting of Revelation in the future. He quoted Hanegraaff's book as saying that since John uses words like "the time is near" and "soon" in Revelation, this reveals that John could not have been looking towards the modern era. Geisler said, "If so, then on this premise the whole book of Revelation (including the Second Coming and Resurrection – Chapters 19-20) must refer to the first century since the word "soon" applies to the whole book of Revelation (1:1; 22:10). In this case full preterism follows which is heretical." Geisler found that the word translated "quickly" in various places in Revelation is *tachu* (tacu) meaning "quick, swift, or speedy." He said, "Hence this term need not, as LD argues, refer to a first-century event but to the

imminent coming of Christ whenever it occurs."[8]

Third, *LD* incorporates metaphorical language of scriptural in a very literal fashion from the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. This is something that Hank, while on his radio program, has accused LaHaye of doing. Hanegraaff said, "The pretribulational rapture model featured in the Left Behind series interprets Revelation 13 in a strictly literal fashion."[9] Yet Hank did the very same thing in his book with a variety of scriptural texts. On the very first page of the book, Hanegraaff introduced Nero as a man dressed in a costume consisting of leopard's skin, eagle's wings, a bear's legs, and the head of a lion alluding directly to Daniel 7 and Revelation 13.[10] Before the end of the first chapter, Hanegraaff had openly identified Nero as the "beast" spoken of by John in Revelation.[11] Additional examples abound. One of the characters said, "Earthquakes seem to occur daily across the world."[12] Hanegraaff didn't do anything different than LaHaye in literalizing the details of Scripture, but he shouldn't accuse LaHaye of violating hermeneutical principles since *LD* was filled with similar examples. On the positive side, Hanegraaff and Brouwer did a good job in painting this historical situation that existed in Jerusalem during the reign of Nero by including many true historical features.

Finally, *LD* inaccurately states the futurist position regarding the activities of antichrist in Rev. 13. Hanegraaff stated, "The pretribulational rapture model in the *Left Behind* series interprets Revelation 13 in a strictly literal fashion. Thus the antichrist dies and resurrects himself physically in order to vindicate his claim to be god."[13] Hank contrasted his approach with LaHaye's:

> In sharp contrast, The Last Disciple series exegetes Revelation 13 in light of the whole Scripture. Thus Satan can *parody* the work of Christ through 'all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders' (2 Thessalonians 2:9), but he cannot literally do what Christ did—namely, raise himself from the dead. . . .What is at stake here is nothing less than the deity and resurrection of Christ.[14]

The problem with Hank's thesis is that the biblical text does not plainly say that the antichrist does this. Revelation 13:3 states, "I saw one of his heads *as if* it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast" (emphasis added). The

NIV reads, "seemed to have had a fatal wound."[15] The word rendered "seemed" in the NIV is the Greek word ώς (hoos) which means, "that is to say, so to speak," or as in 1Thess 5:2; "like," in the sense "like a thief in the night."[16] The text goes on, "And he (the false prophet) *deceives* those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the *wound* of the sword and has come to life" (Rev 13:14, emphasis added). These passages speak of how the false prophet *deceives* those on earth through the antichrist who was wounded *as if* dead. It is evident from these verses that the "death and resurrection" of the antichrist is a satanic deception. Scripture states, "And the whole earth was amazed" (13:3b). Therefore, LaHaye was justified in portraying an actual death and resurrection since the whole word was deceived by this satanic trick.

Norm Geisler reviewed the book and made the following statement regarding the preceding issues:

> Many events in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation 6-18 were not fulfilled in A.D. 70 – at least not literally. For example, the stars did not fall from heaven (Mt. 24:29), nor were one-third of humans killed (Rev. 9:18), and neither did all the creatures in the sea die (Rev. 16:3) in A.D. 70. . . . Although *LD* disavows the label of "partial preterism" as well as "post-millennialism" this conclusion is in agreement with preterism. And if LD is right, then the rest of the Tribulation (Rev. 6-18) must be placed there too.[17]

Geisler hit on both the main eschatological theme and the problem with the partial preterist theology. The theme is that most of the events in Revelation were already fulfilled during the first-century except for the second coming of the Lord. The problem is that many of the events named by the partial preterists weren't completely fulfilled in that century. It's not so much that some of the events that occurred during the first century couldn't have fulfilled Scripture, but that they weren't fulfilled in the thorough manner that the futurists require. In any case, Jesus' birth certainly surprised many Jews who later believed in him. It was only after the fact that anyone could look into OT prophesy and locate the details of Jesus' coming. These are the reasons that our correspondence with those holding a partial preterist position must be seasoned with love and humility that is to be forthcoming of fellow believers (John 13:35).

The Olivet Discourse in *LD*

A well developed theology regarding the Olivet Discourse doesn't completely emerge in the *LD* since it is the first in the series. However, several themes do emerge regarding Jesus' prophetic speech heralded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. *LD* holds that the first portion of the scriptural text of the Olivet Discourse relates to the first century during the reign of Nero. In Matthew's version of the Discourse, Jesus predicted that the temple would be destroyed, then after a lengthy discourse he said in 24:34 that, "Truly I say to you, *this* generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Truly, what is meant by "this generation" is where the discussion on the Discourse must begin. Hanegraaff quoted these verses in the afterward of his second book to tie the generation mentioned in verse 34 to the destruction of the temple in verse 2.[18] After Jesus' lengthy discourse, the Lord went on to say when all these things would happen. In verse 34 he said, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Hank agrees that Jesus has not yet returned,[19] therefore he cannot say that "this generation" is being spoken of in the near sense since if this was the case the entirety of prophesy in the Olivet Discourse would have had to have been fulfilled when the temple was destroyed. Hank can't have it both ways as Geisler aptly noted. He can't say that Jesus was saying that *all* of the events would be fulfilled in the lifetime of the generation existing around 70 C.E., but on the other hand look forward to Jesus' return on the clouds (v. 30) in the future.

Hank tries to get around these apparent difficulties. He said, "This is not to say, however, that all of the prophecies in Revelation have already been fulfilled. . . . Revelation not only predicted fore-future events, such as the coming apocalypse in John's lifetime, but also chronicles events that will take place in the far and final future."[20] According to Hank, "(He is) deeply committed to a proper *method* of biblical interpretation rather than any particular model of eschatology."[21] This is a reasonable hermeneutic in light of the vagaries of theological systems gone awry such as hyper-Calvinism or Wesley's Christian perfection. His method deserves serious attention even though at first glance from a futurist perspective it is logically inconsistent. Hanegraaff would have to draw a dividing line between which events were literally fulfilled during Nero's reign and destruction of the

temple during the Jewish civil war and the ones that were not. Futurist often point to dual fulfillments of prophetic Scripture. This adds yet another layer of theology to that hermeneutic, making prophetic interpretation the vastly complicated science it is. Hanegraaff's partial preterist hermeneutic, even though he doesn't call it that, not only brings some simplicity but may also help to explain away some of the futurist's problematic verses such as Matthew 24:34 which according to Toussaint is a hard one for everyone.[22]

Perhaps what is needed in the eschatological debates on the Discourse is this entirely different perspective brought by the partial preterist scholars. Nixon began his book on the Olivet Discourse from this perspective with the following statement, "If anyone proposes a new interpretation of Scripture that contradicts the sober opinions of MOST known Bible scholars, he is probably wrong. However, this is one case, at least, where one must ignore all existing attempts to explain the Discourse." Next, he boldly stated that Matthew 24:3-22 was clearly fulfilled during the Jewish/Roman civil war of 66-70 C.E., and "the present writer knows of NO ONE who disagrees with this interpretation." [23] Nixon said, "The standards or pennants of the 10^{th} legion (the Roman army's gods) were regarded as the "abomination of desolation" by the Jews of the city."[24] This interpretation contradicts even the most fundamental understanding of the futurist interpretation of the Discourse. Most futurist commentators point to these verses as having at least a future fulfillment regardless of what happened in the first century. Many look to the typology of the second century B.C.E. events under Antiochus Epiphanes, with final fulfillment in the future.[25] The preterist authors do offer an entirely different perspective, but not one without serious reactionary preconceptions against the futurists. Their reactions against the futurists seem to drive their theology as much as the futurists are driven by their own.

Hanegraaff's book wasn't without many redeeming theological expressions. He offered an excellent insight regarding the biblical author's use of visual imagery in the Discourse. In his story, Helius was second in command under Nero, and had one of his scribes read from the Gospel of Matthew 24:29-30:

> But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

His scribe related the meaning of this Scripture to him:

> If you were a Jew, you would be familiar with the imagery. *Coming on the clouds* is a familiar Jewish expression used by our prophets to communicate the majesty and sovereign power of God. His coming on the clouds translates to judgment for those who resist Him and blessing for those who bow the knee. . . . Isaiah, for example, used this very expression to describe God's retribution on Egypt when he prophesied that God would come in wrath and fierce anger to make the land of Babylon desolate, he said that 'the rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.'"[26]

As futurists, we have quite likely missed the sense of the Scripture by over literalizing it. This is hypocritical since it is the same thing that we earlier accused the partial preterists of doing. In the NASB, the text regarding the darkening of the sky is in all capitals, indicating an OT quotation. In terms of Jesus' promise to come in the clouds, should we literalize this in keeping with the promise by the angels in Acts 1:11, or should we allow symbolism in keeping with first-century Jewish thought? This latter course appears more logical, especially in light of Revelation 1:7: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him." How can every eye see his coming at the same time if this is taken literally? In this text, the first portion concerning the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds is a direct quote from Daniel 7:13. In Exodus, the pillar of cloud was literally representative of the glory of God. Certainly, we have to allow for Jewish symbolism and visual imagery given to us by the Jewish scholars who created the NT.

Conclusion – No Logical Middle Ground

The value of Hank Hanegraaff's book was not its theological brilliance but rather the challenge that it offered his readers to develop their own eschatological position. The first book in the series didn't develop an extensive theology but rather laid the groundwork for subsequent books. Hank appears to have taken a partial preterist position not so much as a middle ground but as a reaction against the futurists. In doing so, he has attempted to force his own partial preterism system on them, rather than allowing for what he called an exegetical theology to interpret the text outside of existing theological systems. We cannot suggest a novel middle ground that would negate some of the difficulties with Hanegraaff's position while offsetting those of the futurist position. Instead, we must continue to wrestle with the whole of Scripture with special emphasis on proper contextualization of the eschatological events in the NT. We long for additional validation of the late dating of Revelation. This is not so much for the purposes of proving our futurist position, which we believe, is the correct one, but to glorify the Lord in more confidently proclaiming his coming

judgment and glory. Govett said back in 1985, "In conclusion—fully I am convinced that no ingenuity can extricate the Praeterist interpreter from the endless difficulties, absurdities, historic contradictions which beset his scheme."[27]

END NOTES

[1] Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Disciple* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2004), 393.

[1] Stanley D. Toussaint, "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse." *BSac* 161 (2004): 469-70.

[1] Kathy Boot Thomas, "Is it the End of the World as This Author Knows It?," *Time Magazine* 164 no. 21 (November 24, 2004): No pages. Citied 24 March 2006. Online: http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,995693,00.html.

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[1] Jay E. Adams, *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox?* (Stanley, N.C.: Timeless Texts, 2003), 2-3.

[1] Hank Hanegraaff and Sigmund Brouwer, *The Last Sacrifice* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2005), 342-4.

[1] Norm Geisler, "A Friendly Response to Hank Hanegraaff's Book, *The Last Disciple*," n.p. [cited 23 March 2006]. Online: http://www.ses.edu/NormGeisler/lastdisciple.htm.

[1] Ibid.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 393.

[1] Ibid., 3.

[1] Ibid., 5.

[1] Ibid., 93.

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[1] Ibid., 394.

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[1] Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1898), 33.139, 64.12.

[1] Geisler.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Sacrifice*, 342.

[1] Ibid., 344.

[1] Ibid., 344.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 393.

[1] Toussaint, 483.

[1] Thomas C. Nixon, *The Olivet Discourse – Mystery Revealed* (Bloomington, Ind.: 1st Books: 2003), x.

[1] Ibid., 172.

[1] See for example, John MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 1999) 105-112.

[1] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 101.

[1] Robert Govett, *The Locusts, The Euphratean Horseman and the Two Witnesses* (Miami Springs, Fla.: Conley and Schoettle, 1985), 145.

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Disciple*, 393.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Ibid., 5.

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[18] Hanegraaff and Brouwer, *Last Sacrifice*, 342.

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[20] Ibid., 344.

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[22] Toussaint, 483.

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[24] Ibid., 172.

[25] See for example, John MacArthur, *The Second Coming* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 1999) 105-112.

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