

God's Great Tomorrow, part 1
Clairemont SDA Church
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In my career as a building contractor I learned a few things, one of the most critical of which is the importance of beginning with a straight, true and square foundation. If proper care isn't taken to see that that is done, the job will be "haunted" by problems and work goes forward. Believe me; I speak from personal experience! Floor tiles will be askew. Countertops will be out of alignment. Roof sheeting and roof tiles will be out of square. From floor to ceiling, everything is affected. It's important to begin with a true and accurate foundation. Today we want to take care to accurately lay the foundation for the timeline of God's Great Tomorrow.

Last time we discussed how "all this" began, with a rebellion that started in heaven when a high-ranking angel, Lucifer, chose through pride and blind ambition to turn himself into Satan, the arch-deceiver and enemy of God. Not satisfied with influencing the minds of about one third of the angels, he also led the human race into apostasy, though God through His mercy granted us another opportunity to choose for Him. Salvation cost the life-blood of God Himself, as Jesus came 2,000 years ago and shed His blood on the cross of Calvary. He promised that He would return in glory someday, which is the topic we now undertake.

For most of you, today's sermon is not going to include some startling new concept or some revolutionary new idea. We're not "breaking new ground" here. This is not intended to be provocative or novel. It's simple Bible truth which I'm sharing with you to review the beautiful plan God has in mind for His children, you and me. It is a beautiful plan! It's helpful and encouraging on occasion to look to the future. The Bible tells us that by keeping this hope alive in our hearts, it brings change in our lives. "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure." I John 3:3. The Bible has much to say about God's great plan for the future. In this sin-darkened world, it's a good idea to keep in focus what the goal is; the great objective that God has in mind.

But we must be forewarned that there is also much confusion concerning what will take place. We should expect that. After all, in Matthew 24 when the disciples asked Jesus to tell them about the end

of the age, His first words were, "Do not be deceived." If the devil used the tool of deception to introduce sin back in the Garden of Eden, should we be surprised if he uses it again as sin comes to its close? No, we shouldn't. We would expect that the devil would try to bring confusion and deception into the equation with respect to such an important topic.

Remember that it was confusion, inspired by the evil one, regarding the promises of the coming Messiah, that led to the Jewish nation being unprepared at the time of Jesus' coming the first time. This point, if we want to have a correct understanding of the prophecies as they apply to Jesus' Second Coming, cannot be over emphasized. What did the devil do? Specifically, Satan led them to misunderstand and misapply the promises and cloud the time-line, confusing what was to happen at His first coming and second coming. Promises relating to both events are in the Old Testament Scriptures, but Satan led them to believe that the promises of His second coming were to be fulfilled at His first coming. Because of this, they believed that the Messiah would come in glory, but He came in humility. He will come in glory at His second coming, but at His first coming He did not, at least in the "majestic" type of glory.

There was plenty of Bible evidence to guide them on this, but they misinterpreted or overlooked it. Isaiah 53, the prophecy of the suffering Servant, was there in their Scriptures, but they didn't see it for what it was. The whole sacrificial system foretold the death of the Messiah. They were expecting something to happen which would indeed take place, but not in the sequence they envisioned. But the Messiah had to come and die before He could come in majesty. Isn't that what Jesus said to the Emmaus travelers on the Sunday afternoon of His resurrection? Kindly He brought this to their attention by saying, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" Luke 24:26. It was necessary that the first advent of the Messiah see Him come as the suffering Servant to fulfill the requirements of salvation. The shadow of the cross falls over the entire Old Testament to the eye of faith.

Now, in God's great time-line laid out in Scripture, we recognize that there are three "comings" of Christ to this earth. He came 2,000 years ago to die on the cross. He will come in glory the second time to take us heaven. After the 1,000 years He and His saints will come back to this earth. Please listen carefully to this concept. It's vital! The strategy of bringing confusion regarding the *first and second* coming worked so well for the devil 2,000 years ago, what do you think he is

doing now? He is bringing confusion regarding Christ's *second and third* coming. People today are expecting that the promises that apply to the third coming will be fulfilled at the second coming, and this is bringing untold perplexity and misunderstanding. In a moment, when we lay out God's time-line, this will become apparent. Just know that the Holy Bible is God's book of truth, and if we study it carefully, apply its principles and cherish its teachings, we will not be deceived. Remember that Jesus told us "If it were possible," the very elect would be deceived, meaning that if we are firmly grounded in the truths of Scripture, deception is not a possibility. Thank God for that!

This week and following we're going to look at a time-line for which I'll suggest three descriptive adjectives. The time-line we're going to look at is: 1) simple 2) sensible 3) Scriptural. "Simple" means that anyone with a little study can understand it. It's not that complicated. It doesn't take a college degree to comprehend it. "Sensible" means that it puts the pieces together, the descriptions given in Scripture, in a way that makes sense. It's logical. Our minds can grasp the interrelation of the various parts of the plan. It's beautiful in its symmetry and harmony. We can appreciate God's great plan to bring His objectives together. "Scriptural" means that it is founded on the Word of God, our only Source of truth and safety.

It is truly a blessing to know what God has in store for us! We're going to take a brief look at His coming and the 1,000 years (the "millennium") that follow, and then the new earth, which is God's ultimate design for Planet Earth. This simple timeline makes all the Bible references make sense and removes confusion. Later we'll go into a little more detail.

We start with one of the great promises of the Bible. Jesus said, as we read in our Scripture lesson from John 14:1-3, "I am going to prepare a place for you." "I am going." The word "going" suggests a change of location, doesn't it. Where did Jesus go? He went back to heaven, didn't He. That seems obvious enough, but again, we need to lay the foundation very carefully.

Did that happen? Oh yes it did! The Scriptures record in the first chapter of Acts how Jesus ascended up to heaven as the disciples watched. "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus,

who was taken up from you *into heaven*, shall so come in like manner as you saw Him go *into heaven*." Acts 1:9-11. Where was He taken? To heaven. That's clear enough, isn't it? Jesus ascended from the earth and was taken to heaven. The Bible tells us that He is now in heaven, interceding on our behalf that we might obtain salvation. He went to heaven to prepare the place that the redeemed will enjoy. That is a fact that according to the Bible is not disputable. There's no confusion as to where Jesus is now.

Then He said, "If I go, I will return." Therefore, because His ascension into heaven is a Scriptural fact, His return from heaven is a confirmed promise. We can completely rely on the fulfillment of this promise. He will return. For what purpose will He return? So that we might be where He is. Where is that? As we just saw, that is in heaven. Now think of this for a moment. In many of the Gospel songs and many a sermon from nearly every pulpit the concept of us "going to heaven" is incorporated. Isn't that true? It can't be any simpler than that. Jesus went to heaven. He is coming back to take us there. But, believe it or not, the devil has introduced much confusion on this simple sequence.

Then, after the period of time identified as the "thousand years," Jesus, His city and His people come down from heaven to this earth. This will be the *third* coming of Jesus, taking place after the millennium. The wicked are raised back to life, attempt under the leadership of Satan to attack and conquer the Holy City, the final judgment takes place, the wicked are destroyed, the earth and its atmosphere are cleansed by fire, Jesus re-creates this earth to the original state of beauty and perfection it had before sin changed everything, and this planet becomes the eventual and permanent home of the saved and God's new capital for the universe. What a simple and beautiful plan. As we will see, it puts together in a sensible way all that we're told regarding God's great tomorrow, and it is backed solidly by Scriptural testimony. I truly believe that this plan can be understood by anyone, and once received will be a great blessing to every Christian, to everyone who "loves His appearing."

Let's go back and think about His coming. In the clearest language, the Bible teaches that it will *not* be secret. It will be visible, audible and climactic. Revelation 1:7 tells us, "Every eye will see Him." Matthew 24:27 tells us, "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of man be." It will be seen and known by all.

The Bible describes *only one event*; not two events separated by a period of 7 years, a period stolen from the prophecy of Daniel 9's 70 "weeks." The concept of a seven-year period of tribulation, held widely by Christians today, beginning with a secret rapture, is *not* revealed in the Scriptures. That is a teaching unknown to the Bible. There is absolutely no Scriptural authority for segregating the 70 week prophecy like that. No one was given scissors and divine authority to "snip off" that last "week" of the 70 week prophecy and shove it down at the end of time. This was not taught until about 100 years ago or so, and is a "new-comer" to Protestant theology. It represents a significant removal of the "ancient landmarks" of prophetic interpretation. Now, it may be that many Christians today talk about a period of 7 years of tribulation that follow a rapturing of the Church, and speak about it as if it were a doctrine instituted by Christ and held by the church for the last 20 centuries, but this teaching is not found in the Bible. No, there's only event. Some make a distinction saying that His "appearing" and His "coming" are two different things. Not true! Satan is using this technique to confuse minds and introduce a subtle "second chance" theory. No, when Jesus returns, it's all over. There will not be another 7 years to repent and prepare for eternity.

There is one coming or appearing, and that is when Jesus returns in the brightness of three-fold glory; His glory, the glory of His Father and the glory of all His holy angels. Luke 9:26. All earthly enterprises at that time will come to their end. The Bible compares it to the flood, when people were busy in their lives eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, but when the Flood came, all of that stopped. It didn't continue "in some other form." It all came to a climactic and sudden end. So it will be when Jesus comes. Life will not continue for the wicked in some "other form." All earthly plans and agendas will come to their end. That's why it's so important to be ready for Jesus to come!

For the Christian it will not be "the end," but it will be "the beginning." Oh, it will be the *end* of suffering and pain, trials and annoyances. All of that will be over. Take just one aspect of our lives right now that will forever be gone. God intended that work be joyful and fulfilling, not fatiguing and frustrating. But in today's life, we can find that often work is not a pleasure because of anxieties and malfunctions. Things go wrong. Deadlines not met engender stress. Mistakes are made. It's two steps forward, one back. On a good day! Work in heaven and in the New Earth will be a delight. Gone will be the annoyances and exasperations we encounter so often in our projects!

When He returns, the angels will gather His elect, living and changed or resurrected with new bodies and together we will meet the Savior in the air. The curtain that has separated the unseen from the seen will at last be withdrawn. The first face that we will see (shall we say, "up close and personal") is that of our guardian angel. God has assigned a guardian angel to each of His children. "The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them." Psalm 34:7. As a special assignment, though unseen to you, this angel has guarded your steps and saved you from danger, repressed the forces of evil and been by your side all your life. This angel is intimately acquainted with you and all your doings. Faithfully he has nudged you in the direction of righteousness and encouraged you heavenward. His deepest desire and passion has been your salvation. You will come to know the personal involvement of this guardian angel in your life and the myriad of times your life has been spared from Satan's attacks through his ministry.

He has wanted to be able to share with you and converse with you, to fellowship with you from the very beginning, but the curtain has been in place. Now at Jesus' coming it is withdrawn and with a beaming smile that will send indescribable joy into your heart, you will see and become acquainted with this angel that God in His great love assigned to you. How great will that be! He will beckon you with his hand to join him and the others of God's faithful ones into the great cloud of angels and saints gathering in the sky. Oh, what joy will thrill your heart as you find the force of gravity counteracted by God's great power lifting you upward into the sky!

What joy you will experience as you see loved ones separated by distance or death joining you in this victory ascension to meet Jesus! Into the eager arms of mothers who lost infants to the enemy of the grave will be placed the objects of their joy and affection, their restored babies.

What does the Bible tell us about Jesus at this second coming? Is He coming to establish a kingdom on this earth at that time? No. His feet will *not* touch the ground at this return. The Bible is very clear; we meet Him *in the air*, after which He takes us to the home He has prepared. Let's read from the Bible. "For the Lord Himself will descend from *heaven* (that's where He went to prepare a place for us; where He is now interceding for us) with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God." This passage describes an event which cannot be secret. It's audible and visible. The shout, the

voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God join together to let all know what is taking place.

"And the dead in Christ will rise first." Who could mistake that? How could that be secret? Graves everywhere will be opening. Bright beings, clothed in immortality, their faces beaming with the radiance of eternal joy, will be coming in victory from the tombs, from the cemeteries, from the seas, from wherever their remains were deposited. No, this is not going to be anything that will be secret! By no means. And keep in mind that this passage we're quoting right here is the only place in the Bible that uses the word "rapture" in the context of the Second Coming. "Where is it?" you say. "I don't see the word 'rapture' in the text." It's right in the phrase that follows. "Then we who are alive and remain (the ones who "remain" are by definition the "remnant"; they are the ones "left") shall be "caught up" (that's the word "rapture" in Greek, or should I say our word "rapture" comes from the Greek word used here) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." I Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

Is this "rapture" (if you wish to use that word) secret? No. It's in the context of the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God and the resurrection of the dead in Christ. Where do we meet the Lord? In the air. Does He come and establish a kingdom on earth at this time? No, remember that He promised to take us to the location where He has prepared a place for us, which we saw clearly is in heaven. We're leaving this planet and going with Him to the place the Bible calls heaven. But what about those texts that talk about Him touching the ground at the Mount of Olives and it splitting and becoming a great plain? Will that take place? Yes it will, but not at the *Second* Advent. That will take place at the *third coming* of Jesus to this earth, after the 1,000 years. Revelation 20 and 21 will make that clear.

Remember that the devil was eminently successful in confusing the minds of the Jews regarding Christ's first and second advents. He is doing the same now with respect to Jesus' second and third advents. It's leaving many unprepared for what will take place, just it did 2,000 years ago.

Here where I live, during the early summer months we have something called a "marine layer," which refers to a cloud cover that lasts during the morning hours, then burns off to reveal the bright sunshine. We even have names for this. We call it "May gray" and "June gloom." Right now, during this last chapter of sin's reign, we are

"clouded" by a "marine layer" of fog; fog of uncertainty, fog of deception; fog of all the frustrations and foibles of life; fog of being separated from our loving heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ Who died for our sins. One day soon my friends, that fog is going to lift. The marine layer is going to be burned off by the bright sunshine of God's glory as He returns just as He promised, to take His children home. What a day that will be! Pray each day that just as He's prepared a home up there, He will prepare our hearts down here. "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them." Hebrews 7:25.