

God's Great Tomorrow, part 2
Clairemont SDA Church
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We're taking a "bird's eye view" of God's great and wonderful tomorrow. It is a wonderful plan! Last Sabbath we reviewed the plan that He has for the future, noting that it is 1) simple, meaning that anyone can grasp its basic content; 2) sensible, meaning that it is logical and makes perfect sense; and 3) Scriptural, meaning that it is based on the unshakable Word of God, the Light that illuminates the darkness of this present world.

Knowing the importance of this plan, Satan has tried to engender confusion and deception regarding what God has in mind for the future. Deception is how he succeeded in getting Adam and Eve to sin in the beginning, and Jesus specifically warned us that deception will be used by the evil one at the end, pertaining to the details and facts of His return in glory.

The devil used a very clever technique to set the Jews up to reject the Messiah 2,000 years ago. It was not because the Jews didn't have the Scriptures, nor because they were unacquainted with their contents. Along with other things, it was because the devil inspired them to misapply its promises, confusing what the Scriptures foretold about the Messiah's coming in glory, the Second Advent, with what they said about His coming in humility, the First Advent, that they didn't receive Him.

And yet it was necessary that He first come as a humble Servant, fulfilling the prophecies such as Isaiah 53. It was necessary that He come as the Lamb of God, portrayed in literally millions of sacrifices, beginning with what happened in Genesis 3 when God provided Adam and Eve with clothing made of skins to replace the fig-leaf garments they had manufactured to cover their nakedness.

Nor were the followers of God exempt from some of these misconceptions, being influenced by the teachers of their day. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, exhibited some of this thinking when he composed his poem of praise, being informed that to him would be born a son who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. He said, "That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers

and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear." Luke 1:71-74. That last part won't really be fulfilled till Jesus returns in glory.

John the Baptist himself revealed some of this "Conquering Messiah" concept in his sermons. He said, "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:12. This of course pertains to the last great "harvest" when the earth is reaped at Jesus' coming the second time. The disciples expected a Messiah who would put the Romans down and re-establish Jerusalem as the capital of the world. You remember the mother of John and James requesting seats of honor for her sons at what she thought was the imminent establishment of the kingdom. Even after His resurrection they asked Jesus, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6. And yet, Jesus told the Emmaus travelers, "Ought not the Christ ("the Messiah") to have suffered." Luke 24:26. To paraphrase, He asked, "Wasn't it necessary that the Christ suffer and die for the sins of mankind."

The promises were there in the Bible, but Satan had caused the two events to be confused in the minds of the people. He had manipulated the passages that dealt with Christ's first and second coming. The followers of God may not have been completely free of this error, but at least they didn't go as far as the Jewish leadership, which became so immovable in their thinking that because Jesus didn't fit the template of the Messiah they had in mind, they couldn't accept the humble Nazarene Teacher as being the Anointed One of prophecy.

Because this technique worked so well in the past, the devil has used it again, causing many people today to misapply the promises of Scripture, confusing what the Bible says about His *second* coming with what it says about His *third* coming. Without the simple time-line that the Bible gives to us, it's understandable how that might happen. Take a look at these 4 passages, found in the Bible, which might seem to indicate that when Jesus comes He establishes a kingdom on earth. They are: Daniel 2, Zechariah 14, Matthew 5 and John 5. If these were the only places in the Bible which tell us about God's great plan for tomorrow, it would be understandable that we could reach the conclusion that His kingdom will be established on earth when He comes the second time.

After all, Daniel 2 speaks about the "Stone" which struck the "image" at its feet and "became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:35. Because the prophecy is so sweeping in its scope, we're not told in that presentation that there's actually a thousand years between the two events, the stone striking the image at its feet (the Second Advent), and the kingdom becoming a great mountain filling the whole earth, which takes place after the third coming. It would be later biblical revelation that would complete the picture and put the pieces in their proper order and place.

Zechariah prophesied that "in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south." Zechariah 14:4. This promise will be fulfilled after the thousand years.

In the New Testament Jesus said, quoting from the Psalms, "The meek shall inherit the *earth*," indicating that this very planet will be the eventual and permanent residence of the saved. Matthew 5:5. Will that happen immediately upon His second return? No, it will take place a thousand years later. He also spoke of *two* resurrections. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." John 5:28, 29. He didn't at that time clarify that the two resurrections referred to almost side by side in the same verse are actually separated by a thousand year period. Revelation 20 makes that clear.

These four promises, and others like them, are in the Bible and will most certainly come true. But the time when His kingdom will be established on earth; when His feet will touch Olivet and split it; when the wicked are raised for final judgment; when the kingdom becomes a great mountain filling the whole earth, when the meek inherit the earth; these, when we study the Scriptures and put the pieces together, find their fulfillment at what we'll call the "third coming," which takes place after the thousand years.

How can we be sure about that? Last time we reviewed the beautiful promise of Jesus found in John 14:1-3, telling His disciples that He would go and prepare a place for them. We saw from Acts 1:9-11 that He ascended "into heaven," a word appearing no less than 4 times in that passage, witnessed by disciples and angels. And that's

where He is now. Because He loves us so much, He is in heaven, interceding for our salvation and preparing a place for us. He promised that if He went He would come again (that's what we call the "Second Coming") and receive us to Himself that we might be with Him in heaven. Very importantly, I Thessalonians 4:16, 17 makes it unmistakably clear that when He returns the second time there will be a resurrection, but it will be only of the righteous. When it speaks of the dead, it doesn't include all of the dead, does it. It says the "dead in Christ" shall rise, and that we "meet Him in the air."

Now, the Bible does not contradict itself. If we have promises like Zechariah, telling us that His feet will touch Olivet and split it; if we have promises like Daniel 2 telling us that His kingdom will be like a mountain filling the whole earth, but at the same time we have the clear and explicit instruction that we meet Him in the air for the purpose of taking us to the home He's prepared in heaven, what should we do? How do we put these together? We should look for a way to interpret the passages in a way that is consistent and harmonious. Is there a way to do that? Absolutely! In fact, it's revealed for us in Scripture if we read it properly. Remember the Bible injunction to "*rightly divide* the Word of truth." II Timothy 2:15. That implies that there's a wrong way to divide, or interpret the Bible. Peter spoke about those who "twist the Scriptures." II Peter 3:16. We don't want to do that. When this is done, it's not just a casual, harmless mistake. Peter says they do it "to their destruction."

What is the simple, sensible, Scriptural time-line given to us in the Word? Here it is: Jesus returns in glory, lighting the sky. He doesn't touch the earth at that time; we meet Him in the air and He takes us to the home He's prepared. We spend a thousand years with Him there. Satan and his angels are alone on this earth in darkness. Following the millennium, Jesus, His city and His people return to the earth (the "third coming"), at which time Zechariah 14 is fulfilled. The wicked are raised and attempt to attack the New Jerusalem but are stopped by God for final judgment. The wicked, along with Satan, are destroyed and burned up. The fire purifies this earth and its atmosphere. Jesus re-creates this earth into its original beauty and the righteous at last "inherit the earth." This planet becomes God's capital, and His bright and beautiful "tomorrow," now free from the curse of sin, stretches forward throughout eternity, even forever and ever. What a beautiful plan! It's simple, sensible and Scriptural. It takes all the pieces and promises and allows them to be seen as a harmonious whole.

We'll go back now and take a closer look at what happens when Jesus comes and we go to heaven. What happens to the wicked when Jesus returns? Why are we going to spend a thousand years with Him in heaven? What will the saints be doing there? These will be some of the things we'll look at as we continue our study.

The Bible describes the glory of God as being brighter than the sun. Psalm 84:11; Malachi 4:2. That makes sense: God made the sun. His energy and power lit the mighty orb. His majesty is awesome! When sin came into the picture, in mercy God had to shield us from His glory, because our mortal flesh could not endure the brightness of His majesty. Thus, when God encountered humanity as when He spoke with Moses, He didn't reveal the fullness of His glory. Thus when Jesus came the first time, though He was indeed God incarnate, He came in human flesh, not the fullness of His glory. It would have been too much for mortal man to withstand.

But because sin is so lethal and causes so much pain, God must do something about it. He must deal once and for all with the sin problem. Salvation has been procured by Christ's victorious death on the cross and His triumphant resurrection, and it has been offered to all but eventually God must bring the reign of sin to its close. When He comes back it will be in glory; in the three-fold brightness of His own glory, His Father's glory and the glory of all the holy angels.

Jesus has included in the wonderful plan of the Gospel, provision so that when this happens we will be given new bodies that are able to withstand the brightness of His majesty. We who are alive, according to the Bible, will be changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" at the "last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound (that's at the Second Advent, isn't it), and the dead ("all the dead"? No.) *in Christ* will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." I Corinthians 15:52, 53.

When it says that we *must* (the word "must" is an emphatic word, isn't it. It means that it's required; it's necessary) "put on" immortality, the verb means to "be clothed with." It's the very same word Paul used in his later letter to the Corinthians when he said, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed (he's talking about our present mortal existence and the aches and pains we endure in our present bodies), we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (that is, a body that will be free from fatigue and disease forever). For in this (that is, in this

body; in this life) we groan, earnestly desiring to be *clothed* with our habitation which is from heaven (Yes, we won't those heavenly bodies, don't we!), if indeed, having been *clothed*, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent (this body) groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed (we're not really looking forward to dying, in a morbid sense), but *further clothed*, that mortality might be swallowed up by life." II Corinthians 5:1-4. It's the very same word; "put on" in I Corinthians 15 and "clothed" in II Corinthians 5. God's going to "clothe us" with immortality. In addition to being free from all disease and pain forever, with the new immortal body, we can withstand the glorious presence of His majesty.

Allow your mind to go back to what was lost in Eden when sin came in. Man enjoyed a perfect existence in the Garden and could be in the very presence of God, but when sin came, everything changed. God clothed man at that time, but it was a temporary garment, given to him to wear to cover his nakedness because of sin. It wasn't the clothing of immortality that he had forfeited through disobedience; it was a temporary, provisional garment, obtained by the death of the Lamb. But one day we'll be "clothed with;" we'll "put on" immortality and again be restored to the condition of living in the presence of God's majesty and glory which outshines the sun.

To every single inhabitant of Adam's race this promise, including this garment of immortality has been offered. Jesus bore the sins of every single person when He went to the cross. But God will force no one to receive this wonderful gift. Eventually, regarding those who reject Him and His generous offer of salvation, Jesus must accept their decision, though it breaks His heart. Why would anyone refuse salvation? Why would anyone choose death over life? It's largely because of the deceptions of the evil one. But God has given His truth in His Word, to enable us to be saved from Satan's devices, if we will humbly seek His will.

Ultimately, those who refuse God and salvation will be left to the consequences of their choice. That will mean that when He returns in glory, they will be consumed by the brightness of His majesty. If a rocket becomes misguided and heads toward the sun, what do you think will eventually happen? It will be destroyed by the brightness and energy of the sun. When Jesus comes back, in His glory which is brighter than the sun, the wicked, who have rejected His grace and therefore will not be receiving the new, immortal body, will be consumed.

This is not an arbitrary or unjust act. It is a natural consequence of mortality being in the presence of Deity. It isn't that God's love has changed toward His creatures; it's that He must deal once and for all with the sin problem. Salvation is offered to all, but God will force His promises upon none. Man chooses to accept or reject His mercy. But after He comes, there will be no human life on this planet. Either we'll be in the joyful crowd who meet Him in the air to travel to Heaven, or we'll be destroyed at the "brightness of His coming." II Thessalonians 2:8. After that, Satan will be alone on this earth, left to contemplate the effects of his rebellion.

When Jesus comes, He will first be seen in the east. It's interesting that when He referred to His return, Jesus said, "As lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:27. Lightning can come from any direction, be it north, south, east or west. But Jesus chose to compare His coming as lightning coming from the east. That is where we will first see the great "cloud" that signals the fulfillment of the promise. We first see Him in the east. This is because of the rotation of our globe. Anything that approaches to or is seen by Planet Earth, is first seen in the east, whether it's the sun as it "rises" in the morning, the moon, the constellations or anything. And Christ's coming will also be first seen in the east.

Glorious fulfillment! Precious promise now realized! For the righteous, it will be the dawning of the eternal day; for the wicked it will be the omen of doom and destruction, sending them fleeing from the face of the One Whom they have rejected. The call is made, "'Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?' The watchman said, 'The morning comes, and also the night.'" Isaiah 21:11, 12. This event will be the dawning of the eternal morning for God's people, but the night for those who have turned their back on God.

Next time we'll study the 1,000 years, as described by the 20th chapter of Revelation. What will we be doing there? Why has God scheduled this period of time? What about Satan and his angels here? We'll look at all these issues and find out what the Bible says to give us understanding. God wants us to know His plan! It's up to us to study His Word and become acquainted with its teachings. Otherwise, we will be susceptible to the devices of Satan, the master deceiver. God's love is incomprehensible. He wants each one of us to enjoy the wonderful "tomorrow" He has planned. Right now we can't imagine how beautiful that will be because our earth has become so corrupted

with sin that there's nothing here to compare with what God has prepared. But there will be no one who has chosen to accept Jesus as their Savior and submit to His way that will regret having made that commitment to Him. If you haven't made that decision, why not make it right now! God's great and glorious tomorrow is just before us!