

Series: TIME FOR TRUTH—August 20, 2006

**WHEN THE CLOCK RUNS OUT
2 Peter 3:1-13; Luke 21:29-36**

I. INTRO

- A. How many of you remember something called the Y2K bug? I will never forget the day, Friday, December 31, 1999, 11:59 PM, when **millennial madness** reached peaked and everyone held their breath, waiting to see what would happen—whether or not the world would be plunged into chaos because of a stupid computer programming glitch. People had moved to the wilderness, stored canned goods, purchased generators and bottled water and dried food. People—really **smart** people--were **scared**. Well, as you know, at 12:01 AM January 1, 2000—the Y2K bug became the biggest non-event of the millennium.
1. I need to tell you that I'm pretty skeptical when it comes to stuff like that. I did a fair amount of research--was scared for at least an hour—then filled up three plastic pop bottles full of water and let it go. Good thing nothing happened!
-I'm skeptical about other things too. I don't believe in the Ronco Vegematic. I don't believe in the Bowflex—or most weight loss plans. I don't believe in the Easter Bunny or Santa Claus. I've never believed in backward masking on record albums. By the way, did you know that if you play country music albums backwards, your girlfriend starts loving you again, your pick-up truck works, and your dog comes home. I don't believe that there's a Satanic Ritual Abuse epidemic in nursery schools.
 2. And I also don't believe that the Bible is full of magic numbers that, when interpreted, tell you what's going to happen in the future. I don't believe that the Ark of the Covenant is secretly being stored in caves in the Middle East. And I don't believe, as one Bible prophecy teacher says, that the stones needed to rebuild the Jewish Temple are being stored in the basements of Walmarts all around the world.
-Whatever you believe, the question occurs to most people—**Is there an end?** Will life as we know it come to an end—and will it just kind of fade away, or will it happen cataclysmically? I believe the answer Jesus gave to that question is absolutely true. That Jesus will come back—and that will change **everything** as we know it. But I think that when it happens, it will not only fulfill every prophecy in that Bible, it will surprise **everyone**--including me and most of the Bible prophecy teachers.
- B. When Jesus left the earth--now almost 2000 years ago, He emphatically promised His followers He'd come back. This wasn't a comment or two that could be misinterpreted by enthusiastic disciples who were in trouble. It was whole messages--accompanied by details of things to watch for.
-This promise has been called **the blessed hope** by believers. But there are a lot of people who **don't** believe, called **scoffers**. Peter says this about them:

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4 NIV).

1. Know what I think is the biggest danger for you and me? It's to quietly and slowly slide into not necessarily **believing** like a scoffer, but **behaving** like a scoffer. Jesus said that in the context of going through tough times and facing lying preachers—the hearts of some of his followers will grow cold. Indifferent. "Jesus is coming back. Really? Yawn? What's for dinner?"

-See, all through the NT, there are these reminders: “Don’t forget—Jesus is coming back! Don’t go to sleep! Hang in! Don’t lose hope! Keep pressing on!”

2. My prayer is that God will use this talk to keep our hearts warm and our eyes open. Jesus *will* come again. He *promised!*

II. THE LAST DAYS OF PLANET EARTH

- A. Let me tell you why I have never seriously questioned whether Jesus is coming back. It’s His perfect credibility rating.

-Anyone have someone in your life who, when they tell a story or make a promise, you smile and nod, but silently think, “Yeah, *when donkey’s fly!* I mean, you take what they say, starve it for 10 years—and that would be a little closer to the truth. I do.

-We *all* have a credibility rating with the people who know us best.

1. Let me ask you: What is a credibility rating based on? Anyone know? It’s *truth-telling + time*. When *time* proves that a person is telling the *truth*--the credibility rating goes up. A single whopper can totally destroy your credibility rating.

-You need to know—Jesus’ credibility rating is *spotless*. It’s been tested for 2000 years. When someone like Jesus makes a promise—*count on it!*

2. Think about this for a minute. When Jesus stepped onto this planet the first time, the odds of him, a single person in time, fulfilling 48 specific prophecies made hundreds of years before were astronomical. But He *did!*

-Jesus didn’t just fulfill prophecies—He made them. He was very specific about what would happen to him—betrayal, rejection, trial, flogging, and crucifixion—and resurrection. And it happened precisely as he said it would.

-Jesus prophecies concerning the future can be divided into two groups; what would happen in the immediate future to his disciples and to Jerusalem; and what would happen in the distant future when He came back.

-All of the prophecies he made about the immediate future were fulfilled so specifically, it’s scary. For example, Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple and the slaughter of the Jews that happened in 70 A.D. You need to know that you have every reason in the world to trust what Jesus says will happen.

- B. Now, the question is--what *does* the Bible say about the Second Coming? At this point, I need to give you a disclaimer. This 600 page book is just *one* of the books in my library on prophecy. There are thousands more out there. I just want you to know that I can’t even give a broad outline of the final events of this world and connect all the dots. I’m bound to miss someone’s pet theory.

-Let me simply say: First, when Jesus came the first time, He literally and specifically fulfilled the prophecies made about Him.

*Born in Bethlehem of a virgin

*Give good news to the poor and heal people’s bodies

*Ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, hailed as king

*Die by crucifixion,

*Have people gamble for his clothing, be buried in a borrowed tomb...I could go on.

-I think He will do that again. God is in control of the history of this planet—and I think we may be in the final phases of that plan.

1. Jesus made a very interesting statement in the context of talking about the future. He said that Jewish race would not pass away before He came back. Paul said that, contrary to what was going on in his day, the Israelites would look on the one who was pierced—Jesus—and turn back to him.
-I think the fact that Israel disappeared as a nation—from 70 A.D to 1948—and has pretty much been in the headlines every since is quite significant. I say that cautiously, because there has been a lot of abuse of this notion in prophecy, in essence, justifying everything Israel does as a nation. Though there are differing opinions on this—I personally believe Israel has a role to play in end-times.
2. Something else. When you listen to people talk about the last days, one of the things they almost always mention are what appears to be an increasing number of disasters like war, earthquakes, etc. Interestingly enough, Jesus said that these things need to happen—but that they're **birth pangs**--not the primary signs of the end time. We need to remember that.
3. What Jesus **did** talk about a lot was the surprising nature of his coming. I believe that He was referring to something His followers have called the **rapture of the church**. The word **rapture**—meaning **caught up**-- comes from a letter Paul wrote to a church where, in referring to Christ's coming says:

After that, we who are alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17 NIV).

- a. The Bible also talks about a horrible time in the last days on this planet when it seems like evil runs rampant—and when to follow Christ will cost you your life.
-The question sincere Christ followers have asked is, “Will Jesus come **before, during, or after** this time.” If you've read any of the **Left Behind** books, they quite confidently say that all the believers will be taken. And there's biblical evidence for that.
But there's also evidence on the other side—and, historically, God has both protected his people from tribulation—and given them strength to make it through. I think trying to nail all this down gets into a **lot** of speculation. I do know this; as I said before, we will all be surprised—**and** what the Bible says will be completely and perfectly fulfilled.
- b. I know a couple of things for absolute certain. First, right now, something is holding back the full power evil in this world so that people can respond to Jesus Christ. Christ defeated Satan at the cross, and that had a huge impact on the world. But things won't always be that way. Listen to what the Bible says:

For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who holds it back will continue to do so till HE IS TAKEN OUT OF THE WAY. And then the lawless one will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:7 NIV).

-We live in an age of grace where God is at work bringing his Kingdom here to the hearts of men and woman. But one day, this lawless one—as he's called here—will be released, this world will literally begin to rot very quickly. That dark time in history is called the **great tribulation**. Believe me, you don't want to be here.

- c. A lot of times you hear people say, “You know—evil and injustice and

hatred just keeps getting worse and worse. If there's a God, why doesn't He **do** something?" Well, the Bible clearly says that He will. This judgment will be so profound, so overwhelming, prophecies tell us that big, tough men will hide in caves and behind rocks and **beg** to die rather than face God. The recent film, **An Inconvenient Truth**, and the concern with global warming and hurricanes and violent weather is quite interesting. Listen to Jesus' words about the last days on planet earth:

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken (Luke 20:25-26 NIV)

4. The second thing I know for certain is that Jesus will then come back. After His comment about the roaring and tossing of the sea—and the sheer terror on the planet, Jesus said,

At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Luke 20:27 NIV).

-Around the 2000 A.D. mark, there were a lot of films that came out—**Independence Day, Armageddon**, etc. Well, the Bible talks about Battle of Armageddon--and that's what will happen next. Apparently, instead of acknowledging who Jesus Christ is, the people of earth will align themselves under the leadership of this lawless one (aka, Satan) for one final stand-off. To be totally honest, it won't really even be a battle. Like, there's not a question of who might win.

Jesus will take his rightful place, as Lord of all--and it will be terrifying. Those who have hated and fought him, dismissed him as irrelevant and spit on His Name will suddenly realize exactly who they've rejected. And this whole hell-bent world system will collapse with a groan--to the horror of those who staked their eternity on it. And Satan, the liar who has caused so much tragedy and confusion and death for thousands of years—will be silenced forever.

5. Now, I realize that there is a lot of speculation in our world about an event in Rev. 20 about what has been called the **millennium**—or the 1000 year reign of Christ.

So, what about that? I'm not sure—I just think we have to be careful not to spend too much time in speculation about the figurative language of the book of Revelations. I **know** it will be fulfilled—and I **know** that I don't have to figure out how. Not here in this life.

-Something that I **do** know. There is a final judgment—and everyone will stand before God. Rev. 20:11ff says,

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead,

great and small, standing before the throne and the books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Rev. 20:11-13 NIV).

- a. As I already said, it's very easy to get discouraged as you watch the injustice of this world and get quite cynical--think, "They're going to get away with it!" John, in Revelation, was writing to people who had suffered more than we can imagine. They'd not just had their things stolen, some had watched people they love thrown into arenas and get torn apart by lions; others had watched family members have their heads taken off with a single swing of a sword—or dipped in wax and lit on fire.

John, under the inspiration of the Spirit, who knew the end of all things, says, "Don't despair! Nothing escapes God's eyes, and this God who sees and knows **everything** will bring everyone, including you and me, to this point of final accountability for our lives.

-But it's not just blatant evil that will be dealt with. In an awful instant of purity and truth, every excuse will vaporize, and every life will be exposed **exactly** for what it is. There will be no place to hide.

- b. Everything Jesus taught, and everything the Bible says, makes it clear that there only two final destinations. The presence of God—which the Bible calls **Heaven**, and the absence of God, which the Bible calls **hell**. And it's in this life alone where we make our decision which community we want to be a part of. If we spend our lives pursuing God, we will find Him forever; if we spend our lives running from God and rebelling, He will give us what we apparently want; distance. We choose.
6. Now, there are a variety of ways to understand these prophecies—but all the basics are there; signs to watch for; Christ's followers caught up to meet Him; an awful time that ensues on this planet; the final battle; and the final judgment. Everything we know about life will change—and we will be with Jesus forever.

These are not the speculations of some crazy weirdo's imagination. These are the clear teachings of Jesus Christ, God's Son, the most brilliant and honest person who has ever lived. As you can see, my understanding is limited—so this Reader's Digest version I've given comes with no guarantees. Let me restate this for emphasis: *a lot of people were wrong the first time Jesus came, and believe me, a lot of us will be wrong when He comes again.*

-Now, good people who love Jesus and believe the Bible disagree on the details—and you may disagree with what I've said, but I do guarantee you that *every single prophecy that has been made and every single word of Jesus Christ will be fulfilled, and Jesus will be LORD OF ALL--FOREVER!*

III. WHY DID JESUS TELL US THESE THINGS?

- A. I think you would all agree that prophecy is powerful stuff. I think you would all agree that it's been misused in profound ways.
1. You could call the first misuse, *the inquiring mind WANTS to know*. I need to tell you that I really get disturbed by the obsession with books, charts, predictions, novels--and the wars over who's right. Some religious teachers say things like, "Well, Jesus said that even He, the Son of God—and the angels—didn't know the day or the hour, but He didn't say we couldn't know the **year**." That's ridiculous—and it's dangerous.

Speculation has caused some religious leaders and authors to make colossal fools of themselves by trying to set dates and force current events into a mold they've created.

-Please get this: Prophecy was never intended to be a peek into a crystal ball—and the speculation that goes on really damages the credibility of the Christian community.

2. There's another misuse of prophecy, and that's using it to scare people into God's kingdom. I remember coming home one day as a kid, probably about 10 years old, and everything was quiet in the house. I called out, "Dad? Mom?" No answer. Ran all through the house, my heart jumping out of my chest. "MOM! DAD!" *Oh no! Jesus came back and I got left behind!* Can anyone relate to that at all?
 - Preacher's used to say, "What if Jesus-s-s came back and caught you at a dance, or in a movie theat-ah?" The implication was that if you weren't reading your Bible or doing something religious, you'd get left.
 - Now, the truth is that Jesus **is** coming back. Some people **will** be quite surprised--Jesus makes that much clear. Jesus explicitly says, "Don't get calloused; don't get careless with your faith."
 - But what the Bible says about Christ's coming is intended to **comfort** us, not terrorize us. We live in transformational ways as transformed people out of love and respect for God—not because we're afraid we might get caught!
3. Remember, prophecy always has a context. It was written to specific groups of people. If you'll read it carefully, you'll find that it was never given to satisfy our curiosity or give us a sneak preview. It was given as a source of encouragement--and as a reality check to help us keep our priorities straight; to remember what lasts and what doesn't; to remember what's important and what's not important. And most importantly, it was given so we would remember that **God**, not humans, is in control of all history. That life is not up for grabs—and that the history of this planet is being forced slowly and irrevocably towards God's Kingdom, not Satan's and not ours. God wins!

- B. Let's talk about the huge encouragement it offers. People in our culture get a little cynical about this side to things. People tend to view this teaching as *pie in the sky in the bye and bye*. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we know. Jesus wins and spans all the bad people of the world."

-For people who think like that, I'd like to ask, "So, what's **your** alternative to hope? In your world, who makes things right--because there's a **pile** of injustice.

1. The Bible says it will take a perfect, all-powerful God who knows **everything** and has a perfect sense of justice to make things right. When slavery was rampant in this world, those who had been ripped from their homes and sold to people to work their fields and do their dirty work looked forward to that day when this outrageous injustice would be made right. Right this very moment, some Christ-followers in our world experience pain and injustice and death—things we can't even imagine. They pray, Jesus, **come back!** Make this world new and set things right! The 20th century saw more people butchered for their faith than the previous 1900 years put together. The only thing that has kept Christ-followers going who have been tortured, abused, enslaved, and humiliated has been to know the **one day**, Jesus will come; that pain and suffering and evil don't win; God does.

2. I think there are some of you this morning who need the comfort the Word of God offers you about the coming of Jesus Christ. Maybe you've lost someone so incredibly important in your life that you don't know how you're going to go on. -Some of you have come into contact with something in this world so incredible and unspeakably evil--you've been paralyzed--maybe paralyzed with fear.
 3. Friends, whatever you may be facing in this life, you need to know that the end of the book--the last chapter--has already been written. God wins. Truth wins. Love wins. Wholesomeness, kindness, grace and joy win over all evil. There's been quite a stir over whether or not John Mark Karr's confession to killing JonBenet Ramsey is real or not. Truth is--this is just **one** of thousands of unsolved cases where the predators of this world have preyed on the innocent. One day, they'll all be solved. All the fat cats of the world who have made money on the misery of others, all the predators who have satisfied themselves and otherwise trafficked in the pain of the vulnerable--stealing from them, oppressing them, raping them and harassing them will have their day in court. And there will be ultimate justice.
 4. There's something else we need to see. There are a lot of fear-mongers in our world—like, it's become **disaster du jour**. Y2K, global warming, dirty bombs, nuclear disaster, bird flu, biological warfare—what will it be **next** week? **Next** year? The truth we have to see, without sticking our heads in the sand, is that God is sovereign; the end will come when **He** says so. Jesus specifically said that things will pretty much carry on as usual--and the end will be a surprise for everyone. In a **very** uncertain world, that ought to give you great comfort. If Jesus said it, it **will** happen.
- C. But prophecy also reminds us continually to live for what counts and keep our priorities straight in a very confusing world. Peter, Jesus' lead apostle, said:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives (2 Peter 3:8-11)

1. Short quiz: Anyone know why God is waiting to close things up on this planet? The word is—**patience!** He doesn't want anyone to perish. Isn't that just like God?

See the consistency? He sent His Son the first time because He didn't want anyone to perish, and He's holding back the **Second** coming of his Son for the same reason. He works with people as long as He can. Jesus said that

...this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end would come (Matt. 24:14 NIV).

-The obvious truth is that when the end does come, everything goes up in flames--homes, businesses, highways, weapons, clothes, jewelry, money, financial security--and the awards, degrees, and symbols of our success.

The only survivors will be people. And Peter asks, "In the light of this--what kind of people should **you** be? What should you ultimately be living for?"

2. The second coming of Jesus Christ as it is taught in the Bible is intended to be a reality check to hold things loosely. If you tend to fall in love with your stuff, your perks—it might be good to put little tags on that stuff that say, "Soon to be destroyed; soon to be destroyed; soon to be destroyed." It would be tragic to wrap your soul around stuff that doesn't last.
-Based on this, what should we be ultimately living for? Well, **people**--the only thing that will make it off the planet. People are more important than stuff—and that needs to be reflected in our lives.

D. There's one word Jesus uses more than any other in the Bible when He talks about the last days. Know what it was? **WATCH!** Amazing, isn't it? It's like God knew exactly what we're like--that we are tempted to get drowsy, to get distracted, to get bored, and to fall asleep at the switch. Of course, with so many warnings in the New Testament, no one would be dumb enough to do that, would they? Would they?

1. Friends, that is precisely where the current of "life as usual" takes us. Jesus' most powerful parables were intended to warn us about this tendency. They're stories about accountability. Investment. It's like Jesus is saying, "Don't buy stock in the Titanic! Not a good idea!" He says, use your life and resources to advance what **God** is doing—not gold-plate your future here! Help advance the **redemption** of people's lives. Whatever you do, **don't build little kingdoms for yourself. Be faithful, not lazy!**
2. The question I'd like to ask is, why **wouldn't** we do that? Why wouldn't we make sure we do the things that count? Why wouldn't we look at a blood-stained cross and want to give our best? Well, sometimes we slowly but surely get sidetracked. Jesus warned us about this.

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

For it WILL come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about

to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:34-36 NIV).

-Jesus is talking to me. He's talking to you. He's saying, **WATCH! Be careful**, or your heart--the very core of who and what you are--will be weighed down, **burdened, distracted!** He lists three things to watch for.

a. **Dissipation.** Dissipation means to expend something aimlessly, futilely--in this case, life. It means frittering away your time doing stuff that has absolutely no eternal worth.

b. Drunkenness. I suspect Jesus is dealing with more than over-consuming alcohol. I think He's talking about an existence where we are **numbed** to reality. Some don't use alcohol to numb themselves, they use their drug of choice--work, pleasure, accumulating money, shopping—and they're drunk on it; it absolutely controls all they do.

c. **Distraction.** *Weighed down with the anxieties of life.* Friends, I think **this** is the one we fight most with. We are **obsessed** with anxiety; we get so busy facilitating our families, fixing our homes, commuting for work--caring for our stuff, fussing with this and that, that we mistake really **living** for managing and doing the details of life. We're not doing anything wrong, **we just forget to watch! We forget to have hope! We forget to examine what we're doing in the light of what ultimately counts.**

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

A. On October 18, 1944, in the middle of the battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, my Dad's aircraft carrier, the **St. Lo** was hit by a kamikaze plane.

When my Dad arrived topside, there was just a jagged 15 foot hole in the flight deck with flames roaring out of it. Bad, but not a serious problem. Within minutes, there was a deafening explosion as the torpedoes and bombs and aviation fuel on the hangar deck went off--blowing huge pieces of the ship into the air, and the captain called, **Abandon ship!**

In the middle of the thick smoke, confusion, raging fires and death, one of my Dad's friends got a frantic look on his face, and said, "I've got \$2000 in my locker! I've got to get before I leave!" Against the protests of his friends, he ran after it and he never made it back. The ship was literally blown in half and sank in 25 minutes.

Dad's friend **underestimated** the catastrophe and overestimated his time. He gave up his life for 2000 bucks!

-Jesus said that this world system is not worth investing your soul, your life, your time in—because it's going down. There is a limited amount of time—make it count!

B. Jesus Christ **IS COMING BACK!** All the signs Jesus said would be there are ticking off--one by one by one. Jesus said, "Watch. WATCH! Don't go to sleep; don't fritter away your life; don't get weighed down with things that don't matter." Jesus is coming back. That's our hope. And it **will** happen. So, Watch!