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#1341

Unpacking The Future *What Difference Does It Make?*

I don't know about you but I have real mixed feelings when it comes to wanting to know the future. I've lived long enough and been through enough to have absolutely no desire to find out what's coming next in my life.

When it comes to my personal life's future I take my cue from Jesus who said, *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* Matthew 6:34.

That doesn't mean that I don't make plans for the future, but all those plans can change at any moment and I know that.

Now, not everybody feels that way. If you surf on over to kasamba.com you can choose from over 2200 online psychics who are just waiting to tell your future and to give you advice.

The fees range from \$.44 per minute for Psychic Liba to Chayo who will help you for a \$20.00 per minute or a mere \$1200 per hour.

Personally, if I were a psychic and could know the future I think I'd make my money in the stock market rather than charging people \$.44 per minute on my psychic hotline sitting there hoping someone would actually call.

If you've been living life for a few years and been through some of life's more unpleasant surprises, let me ask you. Would you have really wanted to know all that on the front end? Most people would say "no."

So I'm not interested in knowing my immediate future.

But there's another side to this knowing the future deal that I am interested in.

I'm interested in God's plan for the future of the world. I want to know things like, will God right the wrongs and bring about justice? Will humans destroy all life on planet earth? Will Islam dominate the world? Can I depend on God's promises in the Bible to be fulfilled? Is there really any hope in what can seem at times to be a hopeless world?

Those are the kind of “future” questions that I want answers to.

Well fortunately, we don't have to hire a \$1200 an hour so-called psychic to get answers for these kind of pressing questions.

This is week 1 of a series we're titling “Unpacking the Future.”

We don't really have any way of saying what's next for this world. It seems one unexpected thing after another keeps us guessing. Politicians and world leaders have their ideas, but in the end they're only guessing and 99 times out of 100 they guess wrong. So where do we go for the answers?

At this church we firmly believe that the Bible is the place to go for answers.

Hugh Ross writes, Unique among all books ever written, the Bible accurately foretells specific events-in detail-many years, sometimes centuries, before they occur.

Approximately 2500 prophecies appear in the pages of the Bible, about 2000 of which already have been fulfilled to the letter—no errors. (The remaining 500 or so reach into the future and may be seen unfolding as days go by.) Since the probability for any one of these prophecies having been fulfilled by chance averages less than one in ten (figured very conservatively) and since the prophecies are for the most part independent of one another, the odds for all these prophecies having been fulfilled by chance without error is less than one in 10^{2000} (that is 1 with 2000 zeros written after it)!

You say, “Wait a minute. Don't psychics get things right once in a while?

Just 3 years ago a blue-ribbon panel of psychics, prophets and visionaries was convened to make their predictions for 2005.

They included these: there would be cures for just about every major disease, communications would be disrupted when Earth's magnetic field reverses, a California inventor would cause earthquakes in Los Angeles and San Francisco, NASA astronomers would find a ruined city on Mars, and Israel and the U.S. would invade Syria and Iran. Remember, no psychics foresaw the September 11 terrorist attack, nor did any psychic issue a warning about the tsunami that killed over 150,000 in southern Asia the day after Christmas, 2005.

Gene Emory a writer for Skeptical Inquirer magazine says, "It's hard to think of two events that reverberated around the globe as much as those did, yet the psychics never picked up on them. It's just more evidence that people who claim to have psychic powers

really don't."

Well, what about the Bible?

Turn to Deuteronomy 18 pg 176 Read vs. 20-22

I don't know if you caught that or not, but God just laid out an iron clad guarantee. His prophets are always right. Not most of the time. Not 99% of the time. One hundred percent of the time!

Probably the most recognized prophet of the past 100 years was Edger Cayce. His Association for Research and Enlightenment is still going strong almost 60 years after his death.

Edger Cayce predicted that North Carolina and Georgia would slide into the ocean around 1960 and New York would follow in the early 70's. Around that time the lost continent of Atlantis would reappear.

According to Deuteronomy 18 Edgar Cayce wasn't a prophet of God because he wasn't always right.

When it comes to the Bible we can check the predictions out and apply the Bible's own test. The predictions must be 100% accurate.

Now it's not within the scope of this message today to look at fulfilled prophecies. We want to talk about the benefits from studying future predictions. But they are there all though the Bible to check out.

There's some great books that can point you to the prophecies. We have messages in our CD library. But this morning let me just list a few.

In Daniel 9, written 600 years before Christ, God says that Messiah will come 483 years after the decree is given to rebuild Jerusalem after it was destroyed by Babylon.

In exactly 483 years after that decree, Jesus came. That's specific.

Jeremiah predicted that despite its fertility and despite the accessibility of its water supply, the land of Edom (today a part of Jordan) would become a barren, uninhabited wasteland (Jeremiah 49:15-20; Ezekiel 25:12-14). His description accurately tells the history of that now bleak region.

In approximately 700 B.C. the prophet Micah named the tiny village of Bethlehem as the

birthplace of Israel's Messiah (Micah 5:2). The fulfillment of this prophecy in the birth of Christ is one of the most widely known and widely celebrated facts in history. In the fifth century B.C. a prophet named Zechariah declared that the Messiah would be betrayed for the price of a slave—thirty pieces of silver, and that this money would be used to buy a burial ground for Jerusalem's poor foreigners (Zechariah 11:12-13).

Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. When he was wracked with guilt he tried to give it back. It was taken and used to buy graves for the poor.

We could go on and on with these fulfilled predictions. They are specific and verifiable. They're also 100% accurate.

That's important for us in these next weeks as we study predictions that haven't happened yet. If these hundreds of others turned out to be accurate to the smallest detail, we can have confidence that the future ones will too.

If they all met the test of Deuteronomy 18, then so will the ones that will come to pass in the future. We can have absolute confidence in the Bible.

But then our question for today is "why?" Why should we study the Bible's predictions that haven't happened yet? If they're going to take place no matter what, what difference does it really make? If God's going to do what God's going to do and that's that, what difference does it make to us?

Well, let's think through that question. Why study prophecy?

I. All Of The Bible Is Profitable

Turn to II Timothy 3 pg 1057

This is a immense claim made by the Bible about itself and backed up by the hundreds of fulfilled prophecies. **Read vs 16-17**

The reason that the prophets could write about the future was because their writings were inspired by God. Not their thoughts, but the actual words themselves.

The word translated "Scripture" is the Greek term *graphie*. It's where we get our English words "graph" and "graphite," which is the lead used in pencils.

The words in the Bible we're written by individuals but they came from God.

Now notice, all Scripture came from God. That means it's profitable. There are parts that may seem more practical to us because of what we're going through at a certain time in our life, but it's all there for a reason and that reason is to equip us to be everything that God has designed us to be.

Obviously these glimpses into the future are part of that too.

So we study prophecy because:

I. All Of The Bible Is Profitable

II. Prophecy Gives Us Confidence In God

Turn to Isaiah 46 pg 646

Isaiah was a prophet to Israel at a time when the nation was going through the motions of religion but for the most part was ungodly. He warned about the fact that God would use the pagan Babylonians to punish Judah and then in the end when they turned back to him would deliver them.

Read 8-11

The people needed to know that whatever God said He was going to do was what He'd do. What ever God plans He accomplishes and no president, king, ruler, despot, nation, or army is ever going to change that.

Things are going to get pretty rough on this earth in the coming days. They're pretty rough now! But we can have the confidence to know that God's got things under control. We can be assured that His purposes will work out.

I have to believe that every one gets unnerved once in a while looking at our world. What's going to happen? Is there really any hope?

That's when we read passages like Revelation 11:15 *"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"*

We're living in perilous times, but we're not living in hopeless times. You know the Bible addresses how we're to live in times like these.

Turn to Mark 13 pg 898

Mark 13 is specifically about a future time of tribulation but the principles for living

certainly apply to us too.

Read vs 21-23, 33, 35, 37

In Matthew 24 Jesus said, "Be alert." In Luke 21 *He said, But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.* Luke 21:34

What are the marching orders for people living in perilous times? Trust God, watch for Him, be faithful. and keep your sights fixed on future rewards instead of getting sidetracked with despair or wrapped up in sin.

So we study prophecy because:

I. All Of The Bible Is Profitable

II. Prophecy Gives Us Confidence In God

III. Knowing The Future Is A Motivation To Live For God

It's obvious that we live in an ungodly world. It would be one thing if we could legitimately say that that ungodliness was just in people's lives who didn't know God yet.

If there was a radical difference between Christians and non-Christians in the moral areas we could say, "There's an understandable reason and if we keep sharing our faith then more and more people will become believers and more people will have their lives changed.

Unfortunately, statistically in the church we're not always doing so great in the moral areas ourselves.

Now, there's biblical principles that are certainly life changing. For one thing, just understanding grace is a life changer.

The Bible says, *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...* Titus 2:11-12

Understanding God's amazing grace that brings forgiveness and reconciles us to a holy God challenges us to express our gratitude to God through living for Him.

Grace is God's favor given to us when we really deserve His judgement.

Grace isn't just God's pity or compassion. Grace isn't God setting aside His justice and simply ignoring our sins. Grace isn't God being so busy that we can slip our bad

thoughts, words, or deeds past Him.

Grace is about forgiveness of sin because the full penalty has been paid by another.

The grace of God brings salvation because God sent His Son to pay the demands of our sin at the cross. At the cross God dealt with our sin in the only way that sin can be dealt with. The Bible says *The wages of sin is death.*

God paid sins price by the death of His Son and now He offers forgiveness based on Christ. *...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood.* Romans 3:24-25

Grace is a powerful motivator because it's God rescuing us from an eternal hell that we deserved.

But now listen to how the passage we just read from Titus concludes: *...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.* Titus 2:13-14

Between the Old Testament & the New the Bible devotes more space to the fact that Jesus Christ is going to return than to any other subject.

In Titus 2 the emphasis isn't so much on the fact of His coming as the fact that every believer should be looking expectantly for Him. Understanding biblical prophecy has a very specific purpose.

If you truly believe that Jesus Christ could return at any moment, it will impact your life.

Turn to I John 3 Pg 1083

Read 1

John MacArthur writes: "Why does John describe God's love as 'what manner of love?' Perhaps he tried to call it super, colossal, stupendous, magnanimous, or unbelievable, but eventually gave up."

"Just the concept of God's love overwhelmed John. He might have understood it better had God called believers 'slaves,' 'neighbors,' or 'friends.' But to be called God's children was more wonderful than John could imagine."

God saves us and made us His children by faith and yet in a lot of ways we're all still a work in progress.

Read 2

Positionally we're children of God, and practically, or in every day life, God's at work through His grace to make us more like Jesus. But one day, when we see Him, the process will be over.

The Biblical term for that next phase is "glorification." Right now we don't have glorified bodies. Right now we don't look any different than any other human being. We don't glow in the dark or have halos. We're just us.

But when we meet Jesus, our blessed hope, face to face, we'll be made like Him. Whatever it means to be like him it will be obvious.

Remember: If you've trusted Christ as Savior, you are already a child of God. There's no step up from being a Child of God.

There's another state, or condition called glorification, but there's no higher position in God's family than than we enjoy by His grace right now.

Read 3

What we are is a Child of God
What we will be is like Christ
What we should be is pure

Knowing that one day you're going to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ ought to motivate you.

Knowing that He's coming back, and it could be at any moment, should draw us into an urgent desire to be pure.

And the question is, when Jesus comes back what would you like Him to find you doing? What kinds of attitudes would you like Him to see?

Our lives ought to be purified by the knowledge of His return. That knowledge ought to produce in us the kind of love and gratitude that causes us to respond in obedience and conformity to His pure standards.

Not because we have to, but because we want to.

I. All Of The Bible Is Profitable

II. Prophecy Gives Us Confidence In God

III. Knowing The Future Is A Motivation To Live For God

IV. Understanding Prophecy Prepares Us To Avoid False Prophets

There's probably no other topic in the Bible that has more people spouting off bizarre interpretations than the area of prophecy.

In 1843, people sold their homes and businesses in anticipation of the imminent return of Christ.

They were the followers of William Miller, a self-taught Bible student from New York.

When his date did not pan out some of Miller's followers abandoned the movement. Many, however, tried to find a new explanation.

Ellen G. White eventually founded the Seventh-day Adventists, leading them to the conclusion that Jesus had returned invisibly in 1844, and that he would soon make his presence known visibly.

Another group that held to the 1844 date was led by Jonas Swendahl; they were known as the Second Adventists. They believed that 1844 marked the date, not of Jesus' return, but of the beginning of the last generation. Swendahl taught that Jesus would return in 1874.

One of Swendahl's followers was a former Presbyterian named Charles Taze Russell. When 1874 came and went, Russell concluded that thirty years was not long enough for a generation. So he added seventy years to 1844 and concluded that Jesus would return in 1914.

His followers became known as Jehovah's witnesses. The date of 1914 was changed to 1925, then to 1941, and then to 1975.

Edgar Whisenaut, a NASA scientist, published the book "88 Reasons why the Rapture will Occur in 1988." It sold over 4 million copies.

In 1992, Harold Camping, of Family Radio published the book 1994? in which he predicted with assurance that Jesus was coming back and he had figured out when.

Ronald Weinland, pastor of God's Church, claims to be a prophet. His book *2008—God's Final Witness*, explains how we're already in the 7 year tribulation and 2008 will usher in the last 3 1/2 years of the end times.

All this is nothing new. People have been looking at their current events and trying to tie them in with the Bible for thousands of years.

How do we know truth? Study out biblical prophecy, have a good idea of God's stated plans and then don't go beyond them and don't listen to anyone who starts setting dates.

Studying prophecy isn't about taking every current event and somehow forcing it to fit into the Bible. Studying prophecy is about seeing the big picture plan of what God has said would happen and then watching as the world stage is set.

It is completely appropriate to look at the Middle East and our global situation and to realize from that that the time is growing short. It's inappropriate to set dates and make predictions on our own.

Remember, Deuteronomy 18. If something doesn't happen the person who predicted it would happen is a false prophet and isn't speaking for God.

Rather than falling for false prophets and reading things into the Bible that aren't there, we can listen to God's prophets in the Bible and know that He's got a plan for the world that includes us.

In the coming weeks we're going to look at what the Bible says about the coming of the Lord, the time of tribulation, the anti-Christ, and the final end of all things.

But as we end out time together this morning I'd like us to close in a little different way than we normally do.

I'd like you to close your eyes for just a few moments. Imagine in your mind the fulfillment of these words. They're from The New Testament and they describe what I believe is next on God's prophetic timetable:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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. Therefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

If that were to happen today, this very day, would you be ready? Are you absolutely certain that there has been a time in your life when you have said, "I receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior; I take the gift God has offered; I believe He died for my sins; I believe He rose from the dead, and He lives today for me, bringing all into His family who will receive Him as Savior"?

If you've never placed your eternal hope in Jesus Christ, this is the perfect opportunity for you to prepare for what is indeed to come and may come before we wake up tomorrow.