***Focusing on the Word of Life - PH56-02

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 2:16***

In Philippians 2:16, the apostle Paul says, "Holding forth the Word of Life that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain." The apostle Paul in this verse is calling upon the Philippian believers to focus their attention upon Bible doctrine in order that what he has taught them would bear fruition in their lives, so that when he comes to what he calls the Day of Christ, he will have no cause for regret or to feel ashamed of his life's ministry. The event which he describes as the Day of Christ is the rapture of the church–the day when living and dead believers of the church age are caught out of this world to meet Christ in the air.

Today is, as you know, our annual rally day observance. The purpose of this day's activities is to recall our past blessings in the Berean Church ministry, and to rally to the work which is before us now that the summer months have passed. In practical terms, this day has to do with the day of Christ that Paul referred to in Philippians 2:16. It has to do with our preparation for our personal evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which the Greek refers to as the "bema," when our lives as believers will be evaluated (not relative to salvation). Our entrance into heaven is already determined this side of the grave, as per our acceptance as Christ as Savior or not. Our evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ bill be relative to the rewards that God will distribute to those who have used their lives in the production of divine good.

The return of Jesus Christ from Heaven for the saints of the church age is something which all instructed believers anticipate. On the one hand, we individually, and as a church, plan as if the Lord were not going to return for 100 years. But on the other hand, we live in keeping with the fact that He may appear at any moment. When He will come we don't know. Therefore, we don't make any assumptions that it's time to start closing up shop. Rather, we constantly anticipate that we are going to go on to new horizons and new opportunities of Christian service.

So there is thus both an urgency and a stability in our church ministry and in our personal Christian service. In order to prepare the Philippian Christians for the "bema" judgment, Paul rallied them to the study of the Word of Life–that is, doctrine. As we look upon the scene of local churches today, it is readily evident to anybody who's got half an eye to see things, that local churches today are concentrating on programs of success. They are blind to the priority of usable doctrine being stored in the human spirit of Christians. Theoretically, this is their goal.

Yet, in fact, there is precious little biblical instruction in the average local church meeting gathered all over this nation today. There is very little to prepare a Christian to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ in the area of the angelic conflict that surrounds us with the demon hosts against the angels of God.

So what do we see? Well, we look out across Christendom today, and we see white magic being practiced in the charismatic movements; that is, miracles being performed under the powers of Satan and of the demon world, but the credit being ascribed to God. We also see emotional titillation of experience sharing as the focus of gathering in the body life movement of the Bible church group. So we see that the church visible is left in tattered disarray upon the field of warfare with the satanic hosts. We are in defeat in the angelic warfare because the average Christian has no training and thus no capacity to be able to meet the spiritual combat which surrounds him.

So what is God looking for as we rally together on this day? What is it to which we as a body of local believers here in the city of Irving should rally to (and as individuals)? If I may borrow a phrase from current Marine Corps advertising, "We're looking for a few good men." That aptly summarizes what God is also looking for. That's where the Marine Corps got the idea to begin with, as they do a lot of their ideas. God is looking for a few good men and women. God knows that He's not going to find very many believers who are good soldiers of Jesus Christ, but then God does not need very many. In the providence of God, His kindness has provided the opportunity for there to be very many good, well-prepared soldiers of Jesus Christ. However, all God needs, and all He really works with, in practical effect, is a few good men and women–a few people who are ready for spiritual combat through the study and the storage of doctrine in their human spirits is what Satan fears most of all in all this world.

If you want to scare the devil, just start taking doctrine into your soul. This is what he and the demons fear above all else. In the case of most Christians, they are no cause of fear to Satan. This is because there are so few people who are well-oriented to divine viewpoint. Yet, a few good men and women who are oriented to divine viewpoint is what America and the world really needs above all else. God is ready to take a small, stable, praying group of believers who are willing to sacrifice their time; willing to put their money on the line; willing to put out effort; and, if necessary, their very lives for the spread of the knowledge of God. God will take a small group of believers who are oriented to the Word and who are functioning on divine viewpoint, who are ready to make that kind of investment of themselves, and He will do eternally magnificent things. The records of heaven will be changed faster than the angels can run it into the computers up there.

Now that's what God is looking for–a few good men and women. Such will put the demons to flight. Such a combat team will be the apple of God's eye. For that reason, I would rally you this day, first of all, to the fact that whatever you do in your life, and whatever decisions you make in your life, whether they be economic; social; business; educational; professional; occupational; or, whatever they may be, that there should be one guiding principle that governs you in your decisions. That principle should be that you never make a move in life that denies you access to maximum intake of Bible doctrine. That is the one thing that is the top priority that Satan fears, and without which you cannot survive. So I don't care if you give your kids a good education, if you have not made available to them the insights of doctrine, you've given them nothing. I care not if you feed them well and clothe them well. You've given them nothing. I care not if you build up the biggest bank account in the world, and you hold the finest prestige in your profession, you are nothing if you have achieved that by cutting yourself off from the river of the Word of Life flowing into your soul.

You may just as well forget the fact that you can go all over this country and find it because you can't. You're only going to find it in a few scattered outposts. That is why God is using the Berean Tape Ministry in order to supplement doctrinal instruction, which flows indeed from this place, because that is our life here, and which is not accessible to believers in other places. The tide is rising. Our people in the tape department are getting nervous. The demand for tapes this past month has tripled. I get calls from around the country. I had one from Huntsville, Alabama, recently. It just almost brings tears to your eyes with the words of gratitude, which summed up what many people say to us, and which we get from all directions, because they have realized that the thing that is important in life is to get God's thinking into your soul. Without it, you have nothing, absolutely nothing.

So these people wander around from church to church; they listen to inspirational talks; they listen to challenges; they listen to famous preachers; and, they hear nothing of depth from the Word of God. They are treated as if they were a group of submental morons who could not absorb and appreciate what God thinks.

So we rally this day to being, I trust, those few good men and women that God is looking for. Through the tape ministry, we make it possible for others to rally to that same cause. If you do, I can promise you that you will come under strong attack. The Word of God makes it very clear that those who would live in godliness are going to be persecuted for it. They are going to be held in contempt by their contemporaries. They will be deserted. You will find yourself personally deserted for your stand of making the Word of God a priority.

If you've been around any church very long that teaches the Word of God, it'll come as a shock to you, but you will recognize the fact that there are people that you would expect to rally with zeal when they see the Word of God being poured out; being dispensed; being taught with more effectiveness; and, with greater outreach than any time before, you will find them deserting that kind of ministry. People do not rally in large numbers generally to a church which is teaching doctrine. That is a standard operating procedure factor. People do not rally to the Word of God. They are, by and large, Christians because they are lambs. They do not have the insights and they do not have the capacities to understand what is at issue. They are confused by preachers who give them substitutes. Consequently, they live on those substitutes, and they die not realizing what is happening to them.

However, the laws of God and the Word of God are irrefutable and irreversible. These are moral laws as we have been studying in this book. There are also physical laws. You are well acquainted with some of them. You may not be as acquainted with some of them as you should be. The dietary laws of the Old Testament, for example, are a fascinating area of study. We have in the mill, currently, some instruction on eating. Some of you, I think, need some instruction on eating–not how to eat, but what to eat.

God knew that about the Jews. So He set up certain laws which you can only know by studying the Word of God. Did you eat a pork chop this week? Did you have one of those delicious ham and Swiss cheese sandwiches? You had bacon with your eggs this morning. You're in a lot of trouble, friend. After we get all the material together, I'm going to show you how the Old Testament dietary laws are operational today. I might be nice enough to warn you which service I'm going to do that in, because when I get through describing to what a pig is; how he functions; the nature of a swine; and, his physical structure, you're going to have to be prepared. You may want to come without eating, because I'm going to tell you right now, that sermon is going to do one thing for you. It's going to revolt you.

You may say, "That's nothing new," but that one, I guarantee you, is going to revolt you. And I'm going to spoil all those ham dinners you've been eating; your pork chop specials; and, your bacon, and you're going to discover that there is a wisdom in the Word of God that's going to save your life. That wisdom we can sometimes get hold of in an external way easier than the wisdom that's going to save our souls. It begins with the gospel, and then we survive as spiritually healthy Christians with doctrine.

**Too Little Too Late**

So the Bible says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." That means instruction in the Word of Life. But you will come under attack for doing this. You, as a believer, will be held in low esteem. Then we as a church will be threatened with dissension, and we will be burdened by too little too late. One of the things in military combat that is often a tragedy has been that on the field of battle, soldiers have had to die because the nation that sent them to fight provided them with too little too late to effectively do the combat that they were sent out to do.

Has it ever occurred to you that Satan uses the same thing in spiritual combat? How often have I observed to many of you that there is very little indeed in organizational structure; procedural matters; in outreach; or, in the vision of what is of value and essential that we need? We've pretty well hacked out all those things. The one thing that we need is availability of funds to do the job. The one thing we need is personnel to rally to be the troops in the army to do the job. God has done magnificent things with this congregation because of its application of the Word. Yet, how often we ourselves, who know how the Word of God functions, have been guilty of bringing too little too late to this congregation? How many places have a print shop as we do here, for the outreach of the Word of God?

I'm glad to say, by the way, that the first sheet of the note series is in type. We've got it set. We're on our way. We're going to be putting out these notes to accompany every cassette tape. Can you imagine how many teachers of Bible classes; Sunday school teachers; club leaders; and, even pastors will be able to preach the Word of God in depth and in substance when they get from us a set of notes in complete detail and a cassette tape to listen to the material first hand? Their material is going to have some substance to it. The Word of God is going to be dignified in the hearing of people. If this ever takes hold, it will be fantastic. The voice of God through His Word will be poured out from this place. But do you know what can stop it? Too little too late–not having enough substance for us to do the job with.

You're going to be under fire if we do this, and I'm going to be under fire. Obviously, the favorite target in the battle is the person who's leading the troops. In a local church combat team, you may expect the pastor-teacher to be shot at more than anyone else. You can expect him to become the focus of all the disgruntled church members who want to flake off; who do not want to invest their lives; and, who want to stand around here and wait for us to be thanking them and praising them for all that they're doing for the Lord.

This is like somebody who comes in and does something, and he gets a million dollars for doing it, and you thank him for the fact that he's done this. You are getting rich eternally by your service for the Lord. That's all the thanks you should need. When you're a grown-up Christian, that's all the thanks you want. I don't have to be behind you; pushing you; encouraging you; challenging you; begging you; and, pleading with you. You are going to know doctrine, and you will function on it. When you get in combat as a soldier or Jesus Christ, you'll do your job. God is so good, as we sang this morning, that you need nothing more from Him than His goodness and His mercy.

**The Rapture**

What we are focusing on is the last prayer of the Bible that we have in Revelation 22:20, where John says, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." The Lord says, "I'm going to come quickly." John says, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." The rapture of the church is our blessed hope. We've been studying it in these sessions. It's the thing that we on the combat teams look forward to. Why? Because it's our eternal R&R. It's our eternal rest and recreation. Every soldier looks forward to R&R someplace along the line.

Very soon, that seven-year period of tribulation in the earth's history is going to begin. Unbelievers then are going to receive the outpouring of the wrath of God that they deserve. However, Christians, we have been trying to show you, are going to be preserved from this wrath. So we too, without any hesitancy, can say, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, just as quickly as You can."

Amillennialism, with its Covenant Theology error, can't offer such a blessed hope because it must instead look to going through the tribulation. It must instead tell believers that they cannot escape God's wrath upon unbelievers. Even some pre-millennialists have made this mistake. Soldiers who are assured of victory in battle are soldiers who fight with a morale that's unbeatable. But soldiers who have to enter a battle and they know that they're going to be cut to ribbons, and they're going to experience nothing but suffering, are not soldiers who have much of a morale for fighting. Thank God that our morale is not depressed by the thought of entering and going through the tribulation period.

That period, in its nature, is the outpouring of God's anger and His judgment of wrath upon unbelieving Jews and gentiles. Daniel the prophet told us that it's going to be seven years long. There's no reason why the Christians of the last generation (ourselves, we hope) who are alive today should have to go through something that all of our predecessors in the faith have not gone through. Church saints are indeed disciplined. When we step out of line, we break fellowship in time with God the Father. Then discipline comes upon us, and that discipline mounts in its intensity until we make confession of sin (and make confession of sin biblically). But we never come under the judgment of God that is poured out upon unbelievers. He only deals with us as His children–members of His family.

We rally together to the Day of Christ, as Paul did, through the Word of God to a day which is going to be a day of rejoicing. Pre-tribulationists and post-tribulationists are in disagreement on the nature of the church. I don't want to assume something here. There is the return of Christ that we call the rapture, and there is the return of Christ which we call the Second Coming. In the rapture, Christ comes to meet the saints in the air, and He takes them to heaven. At the Second Coming, He comes with his saints to the earth itself. The seven-year period between the two is what the Bible refers to as tribulation. It refers to the last three-and-a-half years as the great tribulation. This is when all hell breaks loose upon the earth, and an angry God in judgment deals with all unbelieving Jews and gentiles. At this point, we (as pre-tribulationists) say that the church leaves before the tribulation. Post tribulationists say that the church is not taken out until after the tribulation, just before Christ returns a second time.

Part of that confusion is due to the confusion on what the church really is. The post-tribulationists say there are going to be saints in the tribulation period. That's true. There will be people who have been saved during the tribulation. They will be saints of God. That's what a saint is–a born again person. Therefore, they say, "If there are saints in the tribulation, then the church is going to go through the tribulation. But I think you have already learned that there are different kinds of saints. There are Old Testament saints; there are tribulation saints; and, there are church saints, and they're not all the same thing. There are in different groups. There will even be saints out in the millennium.

**Church**

Scripture indicates that the word "church" refers to a specific group of people called the Body of Christ, and it includes only those who have been born again from the day of Pentecost to the day of the rapture. The church is only this side of the tribulation. The tribulation period is actually Jewish. That's the time when God is back working with the Jews' program–the seven years that Daniel talked about which have never yet been fulfilled in history. The word "church" is never used in the Bible in connection with the tribulation. We have Revelation 4-19 that describe the tribulation. The church is never seen there on earth. Matthew 24-25 describe the tribulation. The church is never included. Such a body as the church is never involved there. That's very significant.

Post-tribulationists have to include the saints of all ages in the church. If you can say, "Well, there are not Old Testament saints; there are not church saints; and, there are not tribulation saints as different groups," and if you mix them all together, then indeed you can say, "Well, they all belong to the church, so if there are saints in the tribulation, then the church is going to be in the tribulation." So they have to mix saints of all ages. But as you read the Word of God, you will find that we Christians are a unique breed. We have things true of us which were never true of Old Testament saints, and which will never be true.

For example, there is the fact that God the Holy Spirit indwells you. Every moment, He will never leave you. He's going to go to heaven with you when you leave. There is the fact that you have been baptized with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which has placed you into the body of Christ; that is, into the church. The Old Testament people never experienced baptism of the Holy Spirit. They couldn't have it if they wanted it. They were never indwelt permanently by the Spirit of God. They couldn't be even if they wanted it. They were never united to Jesus Christ as his virgin bride, to have a unique relationship with the Son of God of the most fantastic utmost intimacy that is imaginable, such as between a husband and wife. None of this was known in the past.

So the post-tribulationists have to mix the saints all together to get them in the tribulation. In fairness to the post-tribulationists, they do concede that the Bible doesn't teach this in so many words–this is a conclusion they have reached. The Bible doesn't teach in so many words that the church does not go through the tribulation either. But we conclude that from what the Bible does teach, and the pieces fit together properly in this way, that the church does not go through the tribulation. It does not fit together properly with the idea that it goes through it. The word "church" is never used in the Bible in the sense of saved people of many generations in one body, except in this age only. In the Old Testament, the word "church" was never used of people of many generations forming one body. But here for 2,000 years, generation after generation of Christians has been viewed by God in one body to which the title of church has been given. Any time you use the word "church" in the Old Testament, it is only in terms of an individual congregation. So the very use of the word "church" is very critical.

We interpret the Bible by the meaning of words. That's the historical grammatical method of interpretation–the HICEE technique. We include etymology as one of the factors of interpreting–the meaning of words and how God uses them.

One of the arguments that the post-tribulationists have is Revelation 19:7, which I want to read to you, in case someone ever brings this up to you. It says, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give honor to Him, for the marriage of the lamb is come and His wife has made herself ready." If you have been listening carefully in this session, you heard me say just a minute ago that in Revelations 4-19, the church is not referred to. You also heard me say that the church is the virgin bride of Christ.

Look, what Revelation 19:7 says: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give honor, for the marriage of the lamb is come and His wife has made herself ready." Who is the lamb? The Lord Jesus Christ? Who is His wife? The church. The post-tribulationists take this verse and they say, "There you are. The church is in the tribulation." Here is a passage which admittedly is dealing with the tribulation. Here is a passage that says that the marriage of the lamb is come. Are we going to be married to Jesus Christ? That's the relationship. When is it going to happen?

Well, the Bible says that the church is going to be married to Christ in heaven. In heaven is where the marriage of the Lamb is going to take place. So the post-tribulationists very logically say, "Well, even you pre-tribulationists say that Christ is going to take the church out, and the marriage is going to take place in heaven. Now, here it is–the marriage of the Lamb, taking place here at the tribulation. So the church does go through the tribulation because this marriage is spoken of at the end of the tribulation, in this context."

We go back to language. "Gamos" is the Greek word for "marriage." It is not a "marriage." What the Word says is "marriage feast." That's a big difference. Indeed, at the end of the tribulation, the marriage feast has arrived.

Let's take a Jewish wedding. A Jewish wedding in the Old Testament had three stages to it. First, there was the legal agreement. Parents would get together, and they would agree for a son and a daughter to marry. That was legal. That was known as the engagement. It was settled. An engagement, therefore, in the Old Testament was a legal act. It was viewed as being tantamount to marriage. Sometimes this was done when the couple were still children. Until they were grown, they did not come together as husband and wife, but they were married in the eyes of the law.

This is the condition that existed between Joseph and Mary when Mary became pregnant with the Lord Jesus. This is why, though they were not yet married, the fact that they were engaged was just as legally binding as if they were married. You couldn't call off an engagement in the Old Testament. That was stage number one of getting married–the legal agreement. Stage number two came when the day came for the marriage to be put into effect–for the legal agreement to be activated. At that time, the groom went and picked up his bride and took her to his home. Then the third stage of the marriage was the wedding feast, such as the feast at Cana of Galilee that Jesus attended. This was when the friends of the bride and groom would gather together for the celebration of the activation of the legal marriage contract. So there were three steps.

If we compare these to the Christian related to the Lord, Romans 7:4 (the legal step number one) tells us that we are already the lawful wife of Jesus Christ. So the legal arrangement has already been made. Step number two is the rapture of the church. This is when Christ, in fulfilling the Jewish picture of marriage, comes to take the bride to His home. Then step number three is the marriage feast. And the marriage feast is a celebration of that wedding.

Here's what happens. We have the tribulation and the rapture. Step number one took place in eternity past. We have been committed by the act of God to being the bride of Christ. Step number two is the rapture, when He comes and takes His bride to heaven. Step number three is at the Second Coming, when he returns with the saints and we enter the 1,000-year millennial period for the marriage supper of the Lamb which is here on earth. It is at the end of the tribulation that the marriage supper takes place. That's what "gamos" means. It means "the marriage feast."

Therefore, when we look at what the language is really saying, Revelation 19:7 does not contradict anything we have said. The church has been in heaven all during the tribulation. Now, Christ, in fulfilling the picture in the order of Jewish marriage, says, "Let's go, bride. We're ready now for the celebration. And Christ returns at the Second Coming, bringing us with Him. We have 1,000 years of celebrating the union between Jesus Christ and His bride, the church.

**Imminency**

However, there is a greater problem, and that is the problem of imminency. The imminency of the Lord Jesus Christ's return is the one doctrine that post-tribulationists attack above all else. It is essential to the post-tribulation position to destroy this. Imminency means that there is no predicted event or predicted sign which must be fulfilled before the rapture of the church takes place. Imminency simply means that there is nothing that must be fulfilled before Christ can return.

If there is no prophecy to be fulfilled before the rapture, then it has to come before the events that are predicted for the tribulation, because the Bible tells us a lot of things that are going to take place in the tribulation. The Bible tells us that the world is going to form into four monstrous power blocks: north; south; east; and, west. It says that there is going to be a conflict between these power blocks until the western portion rises into dominance. This western portion will be identified as a conglomerate of ten nations around the Mediterranean Sea. Out of it will arise a man of sin called an antichrist who will be able to control that part of the world, and who, upon the defeat of the northern confederacy (the northern alignment of Russia), will take over the control of the whole world.

Now, at the beginning of the tribulation, one of the signs to identify the man of sin will be that he comes to such great political and military power that he makes a proclamation to the world. That proclamation will declare to the world, "Hands off the Jews." He will say, "I am henceforth the protector of the Jew. Anybody who threatens the land of Israel will have Me to deal with." The Jews will say, "Praise God, our millennium has arrived." For the first time, the Jew will breathe a sigh of relief and think that he is safe. However, that same sign, will tell us that the tribulation has begun now.

If the church is going to be taken out at the end of the tribulation, then we've got to see a man of sin on the scene. We've got to see these alignments taking place and operating. We have to see this man warn the world that he is the protector of the Jew. In the middle, we have to see him turn against the Jew, and set up his own image there in the temple and say, "Worship that. That's your God."

Then we have to see, in the last three-and-a-half years, the things that take place in nature: the falling of stars; the turning of water to blood; the disease; the war; and, so on. Well, all of these are signs.

However, if the return of Christ is imminent, we're not going to see any of these things. None of these things has to be fulfilled before we go. So the poor post-tribulationist says. "No, that's wrong. If I'm going to hold the post-tribulation position, then we've got to see these things taking place." What he is doing is looking out, and he's trying to see that these signs are beginning to be fulfilled in our day, and that we are going to actually wake up some morning and have a news bulletin on the television set announcing that a strong man has arisen over Western Europe, so that we who are believers, in other words, say, "That's the antichrist." All of that, we must be able to see if we're going to go after the tribulation.

Suppose that the Lord were to come and give me a vision like he used to in the old days. I would come up some Sunday morning and say, "I just had a vision last night, and the Lord has announced to me that I am going to have a long life of teaching doctrine. I will teach doctrine for many years–for the next 30 or 40 years. The Lord announced this to me." Now what happens to imminency right away? If my message from God is really true, what has happened to imminency for me? Right away, I know that the Lord is not going to come for 30 or 40 years because He has told me that I'm going to have a long life preaching doctrine. For anybody who knows the vision that I had, imminency will be removed from them. They'll know that Christ cannot come at any moment. He can't come for another 30 or 40 years. However, that does not change the fact that there is nothing prophetically to be fulfilled. There is no prophecy. There is no event. There is no sign which must be fulfilled. All you know is that because of the message I have, that can't happen until I die. So as long as you hear me preaching, imminency is not a reality for you. But once I'm gone, then imminency becomes operational again.

We of the church age are regularly told in the Bible to look for the coming of the Lord. We are not told to look for signs such as are going to be fulfilled in the tribulation period. The post-tribulationists take this argument of imminency and they attack it in this way. They point, for example, to John 21. I'll show you why I gave you that illustration just now. In John 21:18, Jesus said something to Peter: "The Lord said to Peter, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you. When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you wanted to.'" Peter's at middle age at this point. "'But when you are old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you and carry you where you would not want to go. This you spoke, signifying by what death you should glorify God.' When He had spoken this, he said to him, 'Follow me.'"

Here the Lord Jesus came to Peter, who was in middle age, and he said to Peter, "You're going to die as an old man, Peter." Now, what happened to imminency for Peter? Immediately imminency was out of the picture for Peter. Anybody who knew this prediction that God had given Peter–for that person, imminency was now delayed.

Imminency does not mean a time factor. It only means that there is nothing that has to be fulfilled in prophecy before Jesus can return. The return is in the sovereign purpose of God. Part of the sovereign purpose of God said, "I'm not going to return until Peter is an old man. That in no way affects the doctrine of imminency. Yet, the post-tribulationists bring this up and say, "You see, you can't have an any-moment return. There was a time in the New Testament when that wasn't true." Well, once Peter died, the rapture again became an any-moment possible event.

In Matthew 25:14-30, we have a series of parables that the post-tribulationists point to. These parables indicate that there is a long interval of time between the time that the Lord in the parable leaves and when he returns. Please remember that in New Testament times, a long journey was thought of in terms of a few years. So even then, the rapture would not have been delayed very long. The parables suggest merely a short delay, but after the short delay of a long journey in those years (the matter of a few years), the imminency factor is not affected. After a few years, any moment can be the return again. There still is nothing that has to be fulfilled.

In a series of passages that the post-tribulationists point to, we have again the intimations that the program for the present age is extensive. But the truth of the matter is what these passages describe could be fulfilled in a few years (Matthew 13:1-50, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 19:11-27, Acts 1:5-8). All of these things could have been fulfilled in a few years. It wouldn't have taken centuries for these things to be done.

**Long-Range Plans**

One of the favorite post-tribulationists argument is that the apostle Paul had long-distance plans for his missionary work. Their argument is that if Paul expected the Lord to return at any moment, he wouldn't have been making long-distance plans. As a matter of fact, they say that the time came when Paul was told by the Lord, at his second Roman imprisonment, "This time, Nero is not going to let you go. This time you're going to be executed. So Paul knew he was going to die. So imminency was not possible for Paul. That's true. For Paul, the factor of his dying before the Lord's return, as the Lord told him, removed imminency for him, but it still did not mean that something had to be fulfilled before Christ's return. As far as Paul was concerned, the only thing that had to be fulfilled was his personal death. But, once Paul was gone, imminency was operational. The rapture could take place at any moment.

Imminency does not mean that we lack long-range planning in the Lord's work. We still don't know when the Lord is going to return. So we make long-range plans as if He were not going to be back for 100 years. But we live under the fact that there is nothing that needs to be fulfilled. We don't have to wait for these tribulation signs and events before Jesus Christ can take us home to heaven.

**Jerusalem**

The post-tribulationists point to the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem before Christ's Second Coming. But Jerusalem could have been destroyed after the church left. In all likelihood, we are not going to see the rebuilding of the Jewish temple. Three things were essential as the setting for Christ's return: The Jews had to be a nation again. That has taken place. The Jews had to possess the entire city of Jerusalem under their control. That has been achieved. Now, that could change. They could lose that again. But as of now, that has been achieved.

But the third thing was that their temple had to be rebuilt. That has not been achieved. In all likelihood, that will not be achieved until after the rapture. That's when the conditions, under the protection of the man of sin, will make it possible for them to tear down that Mohammedan mosque that now sits on the site of Solomon's Temple, and enable them to rebuild their temple. We don't have to be here for these things to take place, nor did the believers have to be here to see Jerusalem fall, although it was predicted that it would. It could have occurred after the rapture instead of in 70 A.D. Matthew 24 and Matthew 25 have specific signs of the Second Advent of Christ. All of these follow the rapture. They are not signs that come before.

So most of these objections actually concerning imminency were disposed of by the end of the first century. By the end of the first century, there was no problem concerning the fact that Jesus Christ could come at any moment.

So it is a happy event for us to rally to the fact that we are serving a God who has enabled us to be prepared as soldiers of Jesus Christ for the angelic conflict. When we are prepared with doctrine, through a pastor-teacher who instructs us with some depth exercising the authority of that gift, then we will be prepared for the angelic conflict. But we will be under fire. We will be under pressure. We will be under attack.

**Too Little Too Late**

The greatest danger would be too little too late. The greatest danger would be for you to suddenly wake up when you have only a few years left to live, and then you get with it to the Word of God. Some of the saddest words I have heard spoken to me have re-occurred with a haunting regularity. People who have wandered around in churches for many years, and they get up past middle age, and then they come in and they begin learning the Word of God here. How many times have I had men and women say to me, "You know, it's too bad to start entering the Word of God after you're up into your fifties. All of those years before were spent wandering around in a spiritual desert. That could be your case. Too little too late. So for many people, some of their maximum storing of treasures in heaven is coming too late because they have spent so many years out of doctrine.

So my call to you this day is, "Get with the Word." You should do what Paul called for the Philippians to do: focus your attention on the Word of Life. Get up into that tape room and get yourself some tapes and start being a listener of the Word of God. The man who spoke to me on the phone the other day said, "Dr. Danish, I've been listening to your tapes for a year-and-a-half now. I've come to know, after these years, the Word of God. My work calls for me to drive 45 minutes a day, and that tape recorder is going all the time, and I am learning God's viewpoint." That's the only way you're going to learn it. That's what God has offered you. That's your heritage as a child of God. The best is yet before you.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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