

## **Are We Really Living in the End Times? Part 3**

Welcome to our third sermon in our series, Are We Really Living in the End Times?

So far we have been talking about the different viewpoints of the Book of Revelation.

The goal of this series isn't for me to push my ideas on you, but instead, to educate you about the different opinions, and let you choose for yourself. Some of the viewpoints we've been discussing you may never have heard of before, others may sound really weird, and others may sound like I just made them up last night.

One view we discussed already is that we shouldn't even try to figure out the Book of Revelation. Because of all of the symbolism and the obscure references, we couldn't do it justice. We should just enjoy it for the message of hope it brings.

Another viewpoint which has become more popular in the past few decades is called the Futurists view or the Dispensationalists viewpoint. They believe that the End of Times will happen very soon – possibly in our lifetimes – and we will be looking at their view today.

Another view point that we have already discussed is called the Preterists view. Preterists believe, for the most part, that everything in the book of Revelation was written for the time period right after Jesus' death. That everything in the book has already been fulfilled.

That the End Times mentioned in the Bible isn't some end of the world necessarily, but many of them believe, Revelation is about an end to the old ways of the Jews. And, they say, it already happened in 70 AD when the Jewish Temple was destroyed.

**Many people with the Preterists view would compare the symbolism in the Book of Revelation to the 1971 Don McLean song, American Pie.**

I assume most of you remember that song filled with symbolism. Bye Bye Miss American Pie – Drove my Chevy to the \_\_\_\_\_ but the levy was \_\_\_\_\_. Them good 'ole boys were drinking \_\_\_\_\_ singing this will be the day that I die.

For most of us, we have heard that American Pie is about Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper – that all died in a plane crash in 1959. And the symbolism in American Pie included things that were going on between 1959 and the time the song was written in the early 70's.

And that is how Preterists look at the Book of Revelation. Sure, it had a lot of symbolism, the Great Beast coming out of the water – Preterists would tell you that was referring to Nero Caesar – no different than we would say that American Pie was about Buddy Holly and that it wasn't about some future prophecy.

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Two weeks ago we read several scriptures that supported the Preterists view that the events in Revelation have already happened.

We read more last time, but here are a couple verses that we read that support the Preterists' view :

- Matt. 16:27,28 - "Truly I say to you, there are some who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."
- Matt. 24:34 - "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

Preterists look at this and say, obviously Jesus was telling them that he would be back in their lifetime – not 2000 years later.

But the opposite viewpoint, called the Futurists view, well, people with that view don't believe that the End Times have happened. They look at the Book of Revelation and history and say, "This hasn't happened yet."

So when Futurists read the Book of Revelation and compare it to other books in the Bible they see an outline of what is going to happen. Most futurists believe the Book of Revelation is a chronological timeline about the End Days sometime in the future.

According to the timeline of the Futurists, there are about 2000 years after Jesus is crucified until an event they call the Rapture.

Many of you may have heard the Rapture spoken about.

Many people believe that Jesus will come back in the clouds, there will be a loud trumpet sound and those who are true believers in Jesus will be taken from the earth, while still living.

Just as Preterists use scripture to prove their point, Futurists use scripture as well. For example, from First Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul wrote,

“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” They read those words and ask, “What else could it mean?”

Then they read the Gospel of Matthew and in Jesus’ own words about the End Times he said, “Two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be working in the kitchen, one will be taken and the other left.”

Futurists look at this Gospel reference and say, “Jesus himself was talking about true believers being taken away to be with Him, while they are still alive.”

So, from a Futurist viewpoint, one day in the future we are going to be walking down the street, and all of those who believe in Jesus will just vanish. Disappear from the face of the earth. All of those who don’t believe in Jesus will, quite literally, be Left Behind.

That is called the Rapture. Jesus coming back in the clouds, sounding a trumpet and all of the believers would disappear.

So what about those that are Left Behind? What happens to those that don’t fully believe in Jesus when He comes back and takes the believers away?

From a Futurists standpoint, they would have to endure something called the Great Tribulation.

During the Great Tribulation there will be 7 years of judgments on the inhabitants of the earth. God's wrath will be cast upon the earth.

According to Futurists, the Book of Revelation mentions many judgments that come upon the earth:

1/3 of all of the grass, trees, vegetation on the entire earth will burn up from hail-like fire or an asteroid.

The sun and the moon and the stars darkened by 1/3

A world-wide plague of locusts

Painful sores all over bodies of the non-believers

Rivers and seas turning into something like blood – where fish couldn't survive

These are just some of the judgments they believe will be cast upon the earth.

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I want to share with you what one popular Futurist wrote about these judgments. It is called, "What They Didn't Teach You in History Class."

"Many groups try to discredit the rapture by saying most of the end-time events in the Bible have already taken place. A group of people called preterists claim that the Book of Revelation was mostly fulfilled by 70 AD. If the events described in the Book of Revelation took place in the past, I must have been asleep during history class. I don't remember the part where the teacher talked about the time a third of the trees were burned up, 100-pound hailstones falling from the sky, the sea turning into blood.

I think several people need to question their opposition to the rapture doctrine."

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Futurists also believe that right after the Rapture, a very charismatic person will come into the forefront. He will be talking about acceptance for everyone, peace, a New World where we live in harmony.

This same person will find a way to create peace in the Middle East. He will oversee peace negotiations between Israel and the Muslim nations. He will sign a 7 year peace treaty with Israel. He will bring order to the chaos after the Rapture when so many Christians disappear. He will be like a savior to the world.

Then, in the Futurists view point, he will break that peace treaty after 3 ½ years and show his true colors. He will cause all people, weak, strong, rich and poor to receive his mark on their hands or on their foreheads and they will all worship him. His name? The Antichrist.

Futurists believe the Antichrist will continue in power for 3 ½ more years, and prepare for one last final battle: the Battle of Armageddon.

And it is at this point that Jesus will come back with all of the Angels of Heaven, bind Satan up in chains and throw him into the fiery pit.

Now, there is a lot more to the story than that, but for the purposes of this message, you get the idea.

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For many of you, this might be the first time you heard this viewpoint about the End Times and you might not agree with it. Even among Futurists they don't agree about everything.

Some Futurists believe that the Rapture will happen before the Great Tribulation. Some believe that the Rapture will happen about half-way through and others believe that the Rapture won't happen until Christ comes back at the end of the Great Tribulation.

Unfortunately, many Futurists get pretty worked up over their viewpoints of pre-tribulation rapture versus a mid-tribulation rapture, versus a post-tribulation rapture. They have been known to get in pretty heated arguments about it.

But for the most part, Futurists believe in a Rapture, a Great Tribulation, the Antichrist, a second coming of Jesus, and a final battle between Good and Evil.

So, from a Futurists view, how would we know the signs of the End Times? How would we know if we are close?

They have studied what Jesus and others said about the End Days – looking for clues, then they have looked at the events that will happen as predicted in Revelation and determine what events must come first and then they put all of that together and came up with signs of the End Times.

There are websites out there that are constantly tracking these signs. Almost like some conspiracy theories. One in particular, RaptureIndex.com gives a ranking based on the happenings in the world on how close we are, in their opinion, to the Rapture. Here is their scale:

**Rapture Index of 100 and Below: Slow prophetic activity**  
**Rapture Index of 100 to 130: Moderate prophetic activity**  
**Rapture Index of 130 to 160: Heavy prophetic activity**  
**Rapture Index above 160: Fasten your seat belts**

Today we are at a 158 – Heavy prophetic activity. Almost to Fasten your seat belts!

So you may be asking yourself, what are these signs? From a Futurist standpoint, what are the signs of the end times, is there any evidence that they are happening, and if they are, what should we do about it?

To Futurists the rapture could happen today and begin the Great Tribulation and the End Times. Many believe that we are seeing signs of the end times right now, as predicted in the Book of Revelation. So what are those signs?

Come back next week for the answers to those questions.

But today I want to leave you with this: There are several viewpoints of the Book of Revelation and the End Times and it is very hard to find two people that have the exact same view. As I have said before, there are about 43 active United Methodist Pastors serving this part of Arizona. If you asked them, you would probably get 62 different opinions.

One of the beauties of being a United Methodist is that having a different view about a book or two in the Bible is okay. It is our faith in Christ that brings us together as United Methodists, not our view about symbolism in one of the books in the Bible.

To this day, many people still look at American Pie and find different meanings behind the symbolism, and it was written only 30 years ago. Revelation was written about 2000 years ago.

Do you remember in the song American Pie the part about where the king was looking down and the jester stole his thorny crown? Many of us heard that it was talking about Buddy Holly, the King of Rock 'n Roll, but when he died that Bob Dylan took over his title – or others believe it was Elvis as the Jester that stole his thorny crown.

But then there is that religious aspect in the song, the three men I admire most, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost – they caught the last train for the coast, the day\_\_\_\_\_.

At first you would think that Don McLean is just a good Christian, but others say that he is talking about The Big Bopper as the Father as the old timer of the group, the Son is Richie Valens, as the baby of the group, and the Holy Ghost is Buddy Holly, as he lives inside everyone that knew his music.

And then some Christian groups look at the song and it isn't about Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper, but they say that Don McLean, the singer, is a prophet of God. There are complete websites dedicated to proving American Pie was a song hand-delivered by God, to tell us about the upcoming last decisive struggle between Christian Americans and the heathen armies of the world.

So, in comparison to Revelation, if we look at American Pie in a Preterists view – it is a song with symbolism about the events in the day it was written and a song about some great musicians. If we take a Futurists view, was it really a prophecy? Maybe a warning to all of the American Christians to prepare for battle?

Or do we take the view that it is just a song and we shouldn't try to figure it out, but enjoy it for the overall message of hope it gives us all?

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