

Beginning with the End in Mind

Why do we study Prophecy?

Isaiah 46: 9-11 CSB

⁹ Remember the things of old from ancient times; for I am God, and there is no other God, and there is nothing like me, ¹⁰ who announced what was to come from the beginning, and from ancient times what was not yet done; I say: My advice will stand, and I will do whatever I want; ¹¹ who call the bird from the east, and the man of my counsel from a distant land. I spoke, and I will make it come; I've thought about it, and I will too.

Today we are going to start a new series of messages about the future. Everyone wants to know the future. Christian and non-Christian people. The non-Christian - and the occasional confused Christian - seeks to know the future in the tarot cards, in their horoscope on magazines or newspapers, and sometimes, even in the fortune cookies that are given to them in Chinese food restaurants. And I say that some Christians are confused because I have heard of some who like to read their horoscopes and who believe the fortune cookie slips. And what I mean by confusion is that if any Christian wants to know the future, the most reliable place to find it is in the Bible. If the future were in the cards, fortune tellers would be at the stock market, not at fairs and carnivals. If the future were to be found in horoscopes, we wouldn't have so many divorces - you just marry the person the stars say you are compatible with – you marry the right “sign”. If the future were in fortune cookies, many of us would be millionaires with the numbers that are behind the little paper slips. Yet none of those sources is reliable. Want to know what it is reliable? The Bible. Among all its prophecies, hundreds of them have already been fulfilled. Furthermore, more than 300 prophecies in it were fulfilled during Jesus' ministry on earth. From before his birth to after

his death and resurrection, each of them was fulfilled. So, if what the Bible said in the past about things that would happen has been fulfilled, we can be confident that those that are not yet fulfilled will come to pass. We see it clearly in the reading we did a few moments ago - God announces what has not happened yet, what He speaks He makes it come and what He thinks He makes it happen. So, if we want to know the future, the best place to find it is the Bible which is the Word of that God.

As an introduction to the topic of prophecy - *God's message about what He will allow to happen*, which is the most basic definition of what prophecy is - let's look at why it is important to study prophecy. Why it is good to know what God tells us about what will happen in the future.

Why do we study prophecies?

First, let's look at some wrong reasons to study them:

- Out of curiosity
- Simply to acquire information - just to acquire knowledge; just to have more things in your brain; which is connected to the third reason
- out of conceit - to know more to make others feel foolish or ignorant; to stand out in a conversation; out of pride

So, what are some good reasons to study?

I. To be prepared

- *Mark 13:23 - And you must watch! I have told you everything in advance.*
- Jesus is talking to his disciples about the destruction of the temple, and the things that would happen before his second coming in this chapter in Mark. And then he gives them

this indication: Watch out! Take a good look and look for the signs! I've already told you what those signs are!

- Later in v. 33 he repeats the instruction to them and says more: ***"Watch! Be alert! For you don't know when the time is coming."***

- Since we do not know when his return will happen, we must be prepared. And to be prepared we must know how to recognize the signs - what they are and how not to fall into traps and deceptions. When his disciples ask about the signs, Jesus tells them when they see the false messiahs rise up and when they hear rumors of war. That is what we are seeing around us. We must recognize that we are getting closer to the coming of Jesus. And for that we must be prepared. The chapter closes with this warning: ***"Therefore, be alert...Otherwise, when he comes suddenly, he might find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to everyone: Be alert!"***

- Which brings us to the next reason for studying.

II. We study to be transformed

- As I said at the beginning, it is not just about acquiring information. We study to be prepared so that the second coming does not catch us asleep.

- ***1 Peter 4: 7 - The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer.***

- Peter calls us, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to be alert and awake as a result of knowing that the end is near – sober-minded - and to discipline ourselves in action and prayer. In chapter 1 and in this chapter 4 in which Peter tells us about the prophecies, he connects knowing these prophecies with the transformation of our being. He calls us to be

holy, as God is holy; to love one another other; to serve God and others with the gifts we have received; and even to suffer because of our personal relationship with Christ. We must be transformed, as Peter says, from our empty way of life from which we have been rescued and cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ. If we read chapters 2 and 3, the knowledge of the prophecies should even lead us to be transformed in our marital relationships and with other people. It is hard work, but it not impossible. It would seem impossible if it weren't for the fact that we can also study prophecy to be encouraged. Prophecy encourages us to reach the goal of being transformed. Which is another reason why we study prophecy.

III. To be encouraged

- In the 24th chapter of Luke, where the story of the resurrection of Jesus in this Gospel begins to be told, beginning in v. 13, we see two of his followers on their way to Emmaus, and Jesus joins them on the way. They do not recognize him and Jesus sees their disappointed faces because Jesus had not delivered the people as they thought would happen, and they were confused because they did not know what had happened when the women searched for the body of Jesus and did not find it in the tomb. Jesus then begins to remind them of the prophecies from Moses on and to explain how they applied to the Savior. Then they invite him to have supper with them and when he breaks bread, they recognize him and at that moment he disappears. And this is the phrase they say:

- **Luke 24:32 - They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road and explaining the Scriptures to us?"**

- Jesus explained the prophecies to them, and their discouraged hearts burned. They understood and were encouraged. The same must happen with us. That is why we study

the prophecies. Because in difficult times – times like these – we can be encouraged by knowing that at the end of time God will have the victory and with Him those who have believed.

- Let me give you some bad news: in life, this pandemic will not be the only or the last time that will make us feel discouraged, stressed, scared, or worried. But the good news is that prophecy tells us that in the end, God is victorious.

- That's great news - news worth sharing, which brings us to the last reason to study prophecy.

IV. To be sharers

- *Ezekiel 33: 7-8 - As for you, son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, give them a warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'Wicked one, you will surely die,' but you do not speak out to warn him about his way, that wicked person will die for his iniquity, yet I will hold you responsible for his blood.*

- God has given us prophecy - *His message of what He will do and what He will allow to happen* - not only to prepare and transform and encourage us, but also so that we can share it with others who also need to be prepared, transformed, and encouraged. It's our job. It is the job of each of us who call ourselves children of God.

- That is the purpose for which we remain on earth after we are saved. God has left us in this world to announce to people that something terrible is coming, but also to announce that there is hope and salvation through Jesus Christ, and that He is the only hope and salvation. He has set us as watchmen - those who guarded the towers to prevent an attack

and announced when the enemy was coming. If we don't, of course people will be responsible for their own sins, but we will be responsible for their not knowing Christ. In Paul's words in Romans 10:14, "***How can they believe without hearing about him?***" So many people are going to hell every day because we are not spreading the gospel enough.

During the next few weeks, we will be learning about the end of the world. But the end of the world comes to each person when God determines the end of their time on earth. The end of the world comes to every person who dies every day. Every second, in the world, 2 people die. At some point, a person we know, and perhaps a person we love, will be one of those two people. Have you told them about the gospel?

What's more, in a second determined by God, YOU will be one of those two people. Are you ready for that moment? If not, today is the day to get ready. So, we start with the end in mind. God has told us the future. Are you ready to face YOUR future? If not, today is the day to be ready.

Sometimes we think that prophecy is confusing, and yes, there are things that can be. But there are things that are clear: You and I, because of our sin, have a guaranteed future in hell as punishment. But that future is changed by entrusting our eternity to the God who gave His Son to pay for our sins. And that happens when we ask Him to come into our hearts and give Him control of our life - that is what we call receiving Christ as Savior and Lord. When that happens, and we let Him guide us, then our future changes to a future of eternal blessing instead of a future of eternal punishment. What future will you have? What future will your loved ones have? If you want to give them the opportunity to change their future, share the message of salvation with them.