

The Memoirs of Peter
The Future According To Jesus, Part 6
Mark 13:3-37
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Tonight we come back to Mark's gospel and to Jesus' longest sermon on the future. He's talking about a period of time (that is in) that is called the tribulation. Think about that description for a moment. It's a time characterized by tribulation. Throughout human history, there have been times of exceptional hardship. We've already discussed the period around 70 A.D. and all that was happening to the Jews at that time. Another exceptionally difficult time in history was the fourteenth century. The Black Death was racing across Europe; in fact, it peaked in the years 1348 to 1350. It was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history. Historians estimate that it killed 30 to 60 percent of Europe's population. It reduced the entire world's population by somewhere between 75 and 100 million people – at that point, almost one-fourth of the world's population.

In modern times, the times of greatest distress have to be the times of the world wars in the last century. We don't think a lot about those times, those of us who didn't go through them. Those of course who did (and there are some even here tonight who did), they understand this more personally than we do. But in World War I, in five years' time, more than nine million people were killed in combat – nine million. In the last year of World War I, 1918, the final year of the war, another 50 to 100 million died in the great influenza epidemic at the end of that war. World War II, in six years' time, 50 to 70 million casualties making it the deadliest war in human history. Those were dark, difficult times.

But as bad as those times were (and they were), Jesus says a worse time is coming. In Mark 13:19, He says: "For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will." That's a staggering comment by the Lord of history, the One who understands all times and all that's transpired and all that would transpire. In that verse, Jesus is describing the second three-and-a-half years of a future seven-year period that the Bible calls the tribulation. The second three-and-a-half years of that seven-year period is called the great tribulation. As we learned two weeks ago, the great tribulation is initiated by an event that, in Mark 13:14, is called the 'abomination of desolation.' That event comes at the midpoint of the seven year tribulation.

Now I know for some of you, all of these are new ideas; and for others of you, they're dusty and you're sort of dusting them off in your mind. So I prepared a chart that I hope will help you sort of put it all in perspective. It's just a simple little chart here, but we're talking about the seven years that mark the tribulation. They are Daniel's seventieth week; that is, the seventieth week of seven years that we saw back in Daniel 9:24-27 a couple of weeks ago. That's the seven years

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we're talking about. The rapture occurs sometime before this seven-year period initiates. There may be a gap between the rapture and the tribulation period of a short time. We don't know; we're not really told. Nowhere is the rapture immediately connected to the beginning of the tribulation period. We are told, however, what does initiate this seven-year period. Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the day of the Lord cannot come until the man of sin is revealed – this world leader of incredible power and incredible evil – the antichrist. He will be revealed and he will initiate a covenant with the people of God according to Daniel chapter 9. That initiates this seven-year period. Now the first three-and-a-half years of this period of time overlaps (if you want to overlap and see what happens during that time, it's) the first five seals in the book of Revelation. You can read those and understand them. Here in Mark in the sermon on the Olivet Discourse, it's Mark 13:5-13 called the beginning of birth pangs. That is what is transpiring during the first three-and-a-half years of this seven-year period.

Now we mark it at its halftime, at its midpoint, because we're told to do so. In Daniel chapter 9, we were told that at the middle of the seven-year period (at the three-and-a-half year point), the man of sin, this world leader, will break the covenant that he made. And he will do something that Daniel calls 'the abomination of desolation.' We'll talk a little more about that as we review that from last week in a few minutes. That is in Mark chapter 13:14. So you see how Mark lays out over this seven-year period.

The second half of the seven-year tribulation is called the great tribulation because the intensity of all that's transpiring really gathers significantly. During this second three-and-a-half years, seals six and seven from the book of Revelation occur, the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments. If the first half of this seven-year period is called the beginning of birth pangs, the second half is hard labor. And it comes to its culmination at the end of the seven-year period with the second coming of Jesus Christ - and that is in Mark 13:24-27. And so you see how Mark overlays with Daniel's seventieth week and with Revelation as well to some extent. Alright, so I hope that gives you, at least, a general mental picture. Seven years divided at three-and-a-half years – the seven year begins with the man of sin being revealed (2 Thessalonians 2), making a covenant with Israel. And in the middle of that seven-year period, he breaks that covenant. And he does something called the 'abomination of desolation,' and that ushers in the second half of this terrible period of time culminated by the second coming.

Now it is that second half (from the midpoint to the end of the seven-year period) that Jesus is discussing in the passage we're looking at in Mark 13. Again, just to give you an overview of the passage in Mark's account of the Olivet Discourse, here's how it organizes. In verses 5 to 13, you have the beginning of birth pangs. That's from Christ's ascension to the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation. Throughout human history, those things occur that are described there (earthquakes, natural disasters, etc.), but they come to their real intensity – they're Braxton Hicks, if you will, contractions throughout history, but during the first three-and-a-half years of the tribulation, they are the beginning of the real birth pangs. Then you have in verses 14 to 23

the great tribulation. That describes the time from the midpoint of the tribulation to the end. In verses 24 to 27, the second coming; and then He ends in verses 28 to 37 with an exhortation to those who are listening to Him.

So, so far we have studied this – the beginning of birth pangs, verses 5 to 13. Those birth pangs include false Christs, prophets and predictions, war, natural disasters, intense persecution, and the gospel going global and reaching all the nations on earth. That's what will happen from the ascension of Christ throughout history, but all of those things will occur in more intense fashion in the first three-and-a-half years of the tribulation period.

Now two weeks ago, we began our study of the second part of this sermon – the great tribulation from verses 14 to 23. Again, these verses describe the final three-and-a-half years. Keep that in mind as we read them together. You follow along. Mark 13:14:

But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one who is on the housetop must not go down, nor go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that it may not happen in the winter. For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, (He is here) He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

Those final three-and-a-half years of the tribulation Jesus says will be the worst time in the world's history – not primarily because of what God's enemies will do (although that will be bad) and not because of what the antichrist will do (although that, too, will be horrific). It will be the worst three-and-a-half years in human history because of what God will do. So let's look at what Jesus says will transpire during that final three-and-a-half years of the future seven-year tribulation. The beginning of the birth pangs is over and now hard labor begins.

So what about this second part of the tribulation? Let's look, first of all, at how it's initiated. It is initiated by the abomination of desolation. Now we looked at this in some detail a couple of weeks ago when we went back to Daniel, but let me just review with you. Verse 14 says: "When you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand)..." Matthew tells us that whatever this abomination of desolation is, it is standing in

the holy place in the temple and it's what was prophesied by Daniel. Those are two very important pieces of information that Matthew gives us.

Now the phrase 'abomination of desolation' occurs three times in Daniel. He says it was what Daniel prophesied. Three times that phrase occurs in Daniel – in the passage we looked at (Daniel 9:27) which is describing this period of time, in 11:31 and 12:11. Now Daniel 11:31 is very helpful because Daniel 11:31 describes something that's called an abomination of desolation, but that had already transpired by the time of Christ. If you study the context of Daniel 11 (if you have a good study Bible, you check it out), you will discover and conclude that the phrase is used there of a man named Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus Epiphanes lived in the second century before Christ. In 163 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes polluted the altar in Jerusalem by sacrificing a pig on it. And then he forced the priest to eat the meat from that pig. And then he placed on the altar of burnt offering a statue (an image) of Zeus and commanded that it be worshipped (one of the Greek gods). Now that's what the abomination of desolation was in Daniel 11:31. We know that. So that helps us understand the others. It's obvious that Daniel 9:27 is not talking about what Antiochus did because Christ said in His time it was still future. But whatever this future pagan leader will do must be like what Antiochus Epiphanes did in 163 B.C. He will do something in the holy place of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem that will be utterly disgusting and repulsive to God and to His people.

Now you can find out a little bit about what those things are in these texts. We've already looked at Daniel 9. There we're told that he causes the sacrifice to cease in connection with this abomination of desolation; the same thing is said in Daniel 12. But I want you to turn to 2 Thessalonians because here the picture becomes a little clearer of what this abomination of desolation is – this thing that is abhorrent to God that ruins the temple. That's the idea of the abomination of desolation. It is abominable to God and it ruins, it desolates the place of worship of the true God. Now look at 2 Thessalonians 2:3:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for the day of the Lord... (That's what he's talking about, the day of the Lord has not come. You've been told that, you've been shaken from your composure or disturbed by a message you received (maybe a letter that purported to be from Paul), to the effect that the day of the Lord has not come.) Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come (here's what initiates that period) unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (Now what is this future man going to do? Verse 4.) He will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Now you see how this same phrase, 'abomination of desolation,' could be used of Antiochus in 163 B.C. because of what he did in desecrating the temple and having a false god be worshipped,

and what this man will do in the future. It's like in kind. That's the abomination of desolation. So then a future world leader who is called the man of lawlessness (or the man of sin in some translations, called the antichrist in Revelation) will, at the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week, make a seven-year covenant with the nation Israel. At the midpoint of that seven-year period, he will break that covenant and will cause the sacrifices at the rebuilt temple to cease. And he will apparently erect an image of himself and call for worldwide worship. Now when this man first appears as a world leader, the seven-year tribulation begins. Paul says the day of the Lord, that period when God unleashes His fury, cannot begin until the man of lawlessness is revealed. When, at three-and-a-half years, he breaks his covenant and he desecrates the temple in Jerusalem, the great tribulation begins.

Now before we leave this first point, let me settle an important question. How do we know that the events described in Mark 13, verses 14 and following happen at the end of history? There are those who say: 'No, this, this happened early. This happened in 70 A.D. This happened in other times.' How do we know that it happens at the end of history? Well, there are several ways, but let me show you one. Look at Mark 13:26: "Then (after all these things happen, then) they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." Matthew is even clearer. Listen to Matthew. Here's Matthew 24:29:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky (probably a reference to, to meteors), and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days" – we're talking about the end.

Alright, so the great tribulation will be initiated by the abomination of desolation – by a future world leader who stops the sacrifices at a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and who erects (according to Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2) an image of himself to be worshiped.

There's another thing Jesus tells us about those final three-and-a-half years. He says they will be marked by the persecution of Israel. In fact, this period of time is referred to by Jeremiah as the time of Jacob's distress. Here's Jeremiah 30:7: "Alas, for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress (or, as some translations have it, 'the time of Jacob's trouble'), but he will be saved from it (in the end)."

Now look back at Mark 13: 14: "When you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains." Jesus tells those who are His followers in Israel at that time: 'Run. Run for your life. Run for the mountains. And run immediately – don't pause, don't hesitate in any way.' In fact,

look at verse 15: “The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house...” In ancient times and even some places today in the Middle East, homes were built with flat roofs. Most of the year, that area served as a cool, late afternoon outdoor room. You had a little fence or some sort of wall around it and it was a wonderful place for your family to go. Usually it was accessed by an outdoor set of stairs up the outside wall of the home that led up to this rooftop. It was used for meals; that’s where Peter was sleeping, you remember, when he had the vision in Acts 10. It was used for prayer times, for naps, for relaxation. It was used for a variety of things. It was like an outdoor room. They were ahead of their times, right? Typically as I said, there were stairs on the outside wall of the home that led up to this rooftop room. Jesus says if you’re alive when the man of sin breaks his covenant, when he sets up the abomination of desolation in the temple, and you’re on your rooftop when you hear the news, run down your stairs and don’t even think about taking time to go into your house and gather a few belongings – just run.

Verse 16: “...and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat.” Again, this would have been a common image in an agricultural society. If you worked your own fields or if you worked for another, in the morning as you got up, because [there is] very low humidity, much like southern California, you go out in the morning and the air is cool, even during the summer, and so you would have worn your cloak, your outer cloak as the day began. But as the sun came up and as the heat of the day increased, you would have taken that outer coat and you would have laid it down somewhere on one corner of a field and continued your work. Jesus says if you hear the news of the abomination of desolation while you’re working in the field, don’t even go back across the field to collect your coat, even though you might wish you had it that night. You better run.

Now for various reasons, Scripture tells us that in that day many Jewish people will decide not to run. They won’t listen to Jesus’ advice. Others will try to run, but will run unsuccessfully. The antichrist and his forces will slaughter two-thirds of the Jewish nation. You can read about this in Zechariah 13:8-9. The third who survive (according to that text) will apparently have already embraced their God in the Messiah in response to the preaching of the gospel in the first half of the tribulation period. You read about this in Revelation 7. You remember, in response to those evangelists that are sent out, the 144,000:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands. (And there’s some discussion between John and one of the elders about who these are.) And he says: ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’

These are those who came to faith during the tribulation period and were martyred.

John tells us that the beast is at war with the saints. That world leader will be at war with the saints. And his system, his religious system, is described as a woman who is drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. There will be incredible persecution of Israel, and especially of those who come to faith in Jesus. So these new Jewish believers will need to run. And they will heed Jesus' warning here in Mark and Matthew's gospel and they will run. And God will providentially protect them – you can read about it in Revelation 12:13-14. In that text, Israel is compared to a woman – one who gave birth to the Messiah and she is somehow (that remaining third that survived) is somehow given divine assistance to survive the onslaught of antichrist. They are given wings, and we don't know exactly what that means but divine assistance.

As Jesus contemplates those days when antichrist sets up the abomination of desolation in the temple, notice what He says in verse 17: “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!” Here you see the compassion of our Lord. He's deeply concerned about those women who will be pregnant or nursing at that time. And, and I think His concern is because of a couple of things; obviously because the child which would normally be a source of joy is going to make it more difficult for these women to run, to flee for their lives. As D. Edmond Hiebert writes in his commentary: “The time would turn the joy of motherhood into a pathetic handicap.” The other, of course, reason to be seriously concerned about these women is, as history would say: ‘If they're caught, then it would not go well for them or for their children.’

Verse 18: “But pray that it may not happen in the winter.” Those Christians alive and in Judea at that time should pray that the circumstances in which they have to flee will not be unnecessarily harsh and difficult. Matthew adds “pray that it's not on the Sabbath.” That's not because it would be sinful for them to travel on the Sabbath, but because they would open themselves up to being stopped or even punished for breaking the Sabbath. “Pray that it's not in winter” – winter could create problems in two ways. Obviously, the weather at night can be very cold in Israel, and the winter is their rainy season. That means that all the streams and the creeks would be filled with water and potentially even overflowing, making travel much more difficult. So Jesus says pray that those hardships are not there.

You know, just as an aside, I think it's interesting that Jesus urges Christians of that time to pray about the weather. Obviously, it reminds us that the weather is under the personal and constant care of God as He superintends the natural laws that He's put in place. But it also reminds us that God, at times, changes the weather and its patterns in response to the prayers of His people. The most graphic example of course is the prayer of Elijah in the Old Testament when he prayed that it would not rain and it didn't, and he prayed that it would, and it did. But I think God responds to the prayers of His people as well, even if we're not Elijah. In north Texas in just three months,

three months, that they predicted would continue to be exceptionally dry, we have gone from extreme drought to normal. Personally I think that's a direct answer to the prayers of God's people.

But back to our text, Jesus says that the final three-and-a-half years of the tribulation will be a time of persecution for Israel, and especially for those in Israel who have become His followers. Those three-and-a-half years are also described as a time of unparalleled tribulation. Look at verse 19. We read this earlier: "For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will." The Greek word that's translated 'tribulation' here ('thlipsis') literally means 'a pressing together.' Both this Greek word and the corresponding Hebrew word graphically picture a person who is first limited, and then walled in, and finally, gradually squeezed until something has to give. It often speaks of the pressure that comes with persecution. This Greek word occurs some 16 times in the New Testament. Roughly 11 of those times it has to do with this general sense of pressure from various issues in life, sometimes from persecution. But when the Greek word 'thlipsis' is used in the study of last things, it refers to this future period of time. It's used this way five times in the New Testament, and two times the adjective 'great' is added to refer to the second half of that period of time. You can see it in Revelation 7:14 (we already looked at) and in Matthew 24, the parallel passage to Mark's Olivet Discourse: "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will" – the parallel to verse 19 here in our text. It really is reminiscent, our Lord's words are, of Daniel. In Daniel 12:1, Daniel says: "Now at that time, Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time..." And he goes on to detail some of what happens later in that chapter. It's about this same period of time.

Now notice again in verse 19 what Jesus says about this time. He says there's never been a time like this since creation; not now and there never will be apart from this one period of time. Jesus spoke these words in 30 A.D., and nothing like He was describing had ever happened. And it'll only happen once in the future. What exactly will that tribulation look like? If you want to see it, if you really want to understand what that second half looks like, (and we don't have time to do that in our study here but) read Revelation. Read the sixth and seventh seals of Revelation, the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments. That tells you what that period of history will be like. If you'd like, you can go back and listen online when I was doing a series on eschatology back a number of years ago now and not long after I came -- I went through the great tribulation. You can go back and listen to those messages and hear more specifically what happens, but it will be unparalleled in its pressure as God brings the pressure to bear and He begins to unleash the full pent-up fury of His holy anger.

And although it will be horrific, it will be shortened for the elect. Look at verse 20: "Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect,

whom He chose, He shortened the days.” That’s such an encouraging verse because as dark and as out of control as those times will appear, the sovereign Lord is still on His throne. In fact, the language implies that it was in the past that the Lord decreed to shorten those days. God determined, in eternity past, to artificially limit those days because if He didn’t, no human life would be preserved. It would mean the destruction of the human race. And He decided to shorten them for the sake of His elect. The word simply means those whom He chose, and it’s repeated for emphasis – those whom He has chosen for salvation and for Himself. This refers to those whom He has chosen and who eventually come to genuine faith during the tribulation period, and whom antichrist has not yet killed. God’s looking out for them even in the midst of pouring out His judgment on the unbelieving world.

The great tribulation will also be filled with spiritual deception. Look at verse 21: “And then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ’; or, ‘Behold, He is there’; do not believe him...” Matthew adds: “If they say to you, ‘Behold, He’s in the wilderness,’ do not go out... ‘Behold, He’s in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.” You know, what is remarkable to me about this text is how it shows the persistence of Satan in his agenda. Even as the second coming draws near, he will launch an all-out effort against Jesus’ followers. Jesus’ words here, by the way, even hint that these false Christs and these false prophets will infiltrate true believers, those who have fled for their lives. Even as they run and hide, Satan will relentlessly pursue them with lies designed to mislead them and perhaps even to flush them out of hiding.

Verse 22 goes on to say: “for false Christs (‘pseudo-Christs’, those who claim to be the Messiah; notice it’s plural, more than one) and false prophets (‘pseudo-prophets’ literally, many who falsely claim to speak revelation from God) will arise, and they will show signs and wonders...” They will work signs and wonders. They’ll work miracles. It’s possible these will be done through deception, sleight of hand. It’s also possible they’ll be accomplished through the very real power of Satan. And 2 Thessalonians 2:9 describes the man of lawlessness: “the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders...” And read Revelation 13 and you read about the miracles of the false prophet, the religious head of that system that the antichrist will set up.

Now why will Satan go to all this trouble? The chilling answer comes at the end of verse 22: “...in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect.” Still that late in human history and with that few true believers still on the planet, those who’ve been saved during the tribulation period, he hopes to lead them astray. But don’t you love those two little words – “if possible.” It means it’s not possible. It’s impossible – not going to happen. “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Now why shouldn’t the Christians at that time believe those who say, ‘The Messiah’s over there. He’s out in the wilderness. He’s in this room. He’s in this place.’? Why shouldn’t they believe that? Well, listen to Matthew. Jesus added this statement in the Olivet Discourse and Matthew

records it for us. Matthew 24:27 – “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Don’t believe them when they say: ‘Oh, the Messiah is here and He’s come secretly. You can go see Him. He’s out in the wilderness. He’s over here in this room. He’s in this building.’ Don’t believe that. When He comes, it’ll be just like lightning. It’ll be visible to everyone. When a bolt of lightning flashes across the night sky, everybody sees it. In the same way, when Jesus really returns, you won’t miss it. When the second coming happens, you will know. Everyone will know, and we’ll see that unfold in the verses coming. What an amazing description of those three-and-a-half years.

Now before we look at the application for us, I want you to notice the application for those believers who will be living in those times. Verse 23: “But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.” Now remember, Jesus is talking to four of His apostles on Tuesday before His crucifixion - that raises a fascinating question. Why would Jesus tell the apostles this if they were not going to be there and He knew they weren’t going to be there? Why would Jesus tell any Christians this if all Christians are going to be raptured before the tribulation? It’s because, as we’ve already seen, there will be many who come to faith during the tribulation period, and this passage serves as a warning to help them. ‘Beware,’ Jesus says. ‘Be careful. I’ve told you everything in advance. Don’t be duped. Don’t be surprised. I’ve told you everything you need to know to keep you from being led astray.’ Think about this for a moment. Think about how encouraging this would be if you were one of those tribulation believers – if you had come to faith after the rapture, after the man of sin had been revealed and you had turned to the Scripture, you had come to genuine faith in Christ. And as things began to unfold and as the world began to unravel and as God began to unleash the fury of His wrath against this planet, you read this sermon and you came to what our Lord says. It would serve as a wonderful encouragement to you. God is still on His throne. History is unfolding just as Jesus said it would.

But don’t forget that this passage is helpful for all Christians for all time because prophecy serves a spiritual purpose, even for those who won’t experience its fulfillment. Why else, for example, would Isaiah prophesy the destruction of Judah by Babylon 150 years before it happened to people who wouldn’t be there? It’s because there are lessons to be learned. And that brings us to the question for us. How does this apply to us? We know how it applies, verse 23, to those who’ll be alive then, but what about for us? Well, there are many different ways, and I’m sure the Spirit will apply it in ways I haven’t thought of to your heart and life, but let me give you a couple of ideas. First of all, this passage reminds me that the justice of God demands that He deal with sin. He will judge the sin of the world as a whole in the tribulation period. He will literally unleash the full fury of His anger – righteous, holy anger – against sin. It has been pent-up and stored, as Paul says in Romans 4, since the world was created, since He destroyed the world with a flood. But in that day, He will unleash it.

He will also judge every sin of every single person. If you aren’t in Christ, understand this. I beg you to understand this. If you haven’t genuinely come to faith in Christ, you will stand before

Jesus Christ and you will experience the full fury of His wrath personally. That's why even during the tribulation they, they try to hide in the rocks and the caves of the mountains (Revelation tells us) to hide from the wrath of the Lamb. Look at what it looks like. Turn with me to Revelation chapter 20. Let me show you what it looks like on a very personal level. Revelation 20:11: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away." In other words, the universe as we know it implodes and is destroyed and there's no place for them. In other words, at this moment, there is God and there is every living being that He created, every intelligent living being He created. And in this case, it's those who haven't believed in His Son who stand at this judgment. "I saw the dead, the great and the small (it doesn't matter what your station in life is), standing before the throne (one by one, sinner after sinner will stand before this majestic God and give an account), and the books were opened..." The implication there, 'the scrolls were opened,' has to do with the divine records. Not that God needs written records – this is given to give us insight into the fact that God knows everything. He knows every secret thought you've had. He knows every act you've committed. He knows everything that's ever gone on in your life. And out of the knowledge that He has of your life, if you're not in Christ, you will be judged. "...and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (Verse 15) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Don't lose sight of the reality that our loving, gracious God who extends forgiveness in His Son is a God of impeccable holiness and unbending justice, and every single sin will be punished. Every sin – not one sin you have ever committed will go unpunished. It will either be punished on Christ on the cross because you have embraced Him as Lord and Savior, or it will be punished personally on you forever.

There's a second lesson in this text, and that is that God has graciously chosen some sinners who deserve His judgment for salvation. I love that text in Revelation 7 we looked at earlier where it says there, there's this huge crowd (can't be numbered) of people from every tribe and tongue and people group on earth whom God has chosen for Himself and whom He redeems. You say how can I be sure that I'm chosen? The answer to that is are you willing to repent and believe. If you're willing to repent and believe, that's the assurance that you're chosen.

Thirdly, I love this: even as God judges the world for its rebellion, He continues to care for His own. He looks out for His own. He shortens the days for the sake of His own. He cares for them even in the middle of the outpouring of His wrath. They're sheltered, protected from that wrath. They may experience human persecution, but they will not suffer the wrath of God. As Paul says, Christ is the one "who rescues us from the wrath that's coming."

There's one other point I want you to see as we close our time. Turn with me to Romans 8. I told you this word 'tribulation' is used in other contexts beside the seven-year period we've been talking about. I love this. Romans 8:35: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation...?" Even during our own lifetimes – we may and we will not go through the tribulation period because the rapture will occur first, unless the Lord takes us in death. But even though we will not face that tribulation, in our lifetimes we face a different kind of tribulation – the pressure of all the things that happen in life. And even during our own lifetimes, times of tribulation cannot separate us from the love of God. Even in the midst of tribulation, He shelters and cares for His own. Let's pray together.

Father, we are sobered by the reality of what is coming someday. We're sobered because we're reminded of what our sins really deserve and what many will receive from the hand of Your justice and Your holiness. Father, we thank You that we're sheltered from that wrath in the person of Your Son. We thank You that in Him, our sins are completely and finally judged, that "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." No guilty verdict, no sentence, no execution, no lake of fire, no great white throne; but instead, Your grace and Your love and Your adoption, and so that in the coming ages You might lavish us with Your kindness in Christ Jesus. Lord, we thank You and bless You for Your grace.

But I pray, Father, for those here tonight who may really not know Jesus, who will face the fury of Your wrath. Lord, will You remember mercy in their lives? Will You bring them to the place of true faith and repentance? That's our prayer. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.