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# THE PLAIN AND OPEN TEACHINGS OF JESUS

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## THE PLAIN AND OPEN TEACHINGS OF JESUS

In our last article, **Converting ‘Pauls’ into ‘Sauls’** we highlighted the importance for all to break the cycle of judging one another and look to the life and ministry of Jesus, not the Hebrew prophets, as the exemplar for our conduct. We explained that when a religious organization teaches its members to judge the value of another’s religion, that religion becomes a breeding ground for apostasy, agnosticism, and even atheism. It is the prime reason why once faithful preachers of the good news turn into persecutors against their own religion – from Pauls to Sauls. This article is a continuation of the counsel to look to Jesus rather than the prophets to guide us through our temporal life on earth in anticipation and in preparation of the real life in the heavens. (*1 Timothy 6:19*)

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A common theme in the articles on our site is the need to focus on the actual, authentic, plain and open teachings of Jesus. This is so vital in our day since the majority of Christian religions focus their ministry on eschatology – the study of prophecy and end times – rather than the actual and factual matters that Jesus taught. Yes, Jesus did prophesy about the destruction of Jerusalem and his second coming, and he allowed the Apostle John to see various visions which John recorded in the book of ***Revelation***. But none of these prophetic matters excuse us from exercising faith in the actual, factual teachings.

We can only truly understand a prophecy after it has been fulfilled. Up until that day, we can only speculate as to its meaning and timing. But the plain and open teachings can be understood and applied now and they do not change according to world events or the whims of men. Even when they have been shrouded with superfluous manmade ideas, the plain and open teachings remain untarnished and unambiguous no matter who peels back the dross.

### Gaining Perspective

Although eschatology experienced a tremendous boom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christians have long been in keen anticipation of the end of ‘the system of things,’ followed by the immediate return of Jesus. These ideas arose from Jesus’ discussion with his apostles one night on the Mount of Olives where he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, the adversity that his followers would suffer, and his second coming. Matthew, Mark and Luke recorded their recollections of that discussion at ***Matthew 24-25, Mark 13*** and ***Luke 21***.

We note that all of the books of the Christian scriptures, except the writings of the Apostle John, were written during the period 41 C.E. to 65 C.E., prior to, and in anticipation of, the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in 70 C.E. Therefore, when considering the prophecies recorded in those books, it is important to understand that those who wrote them and those who read them in the first century, applied the prophecies to events they expected would occur in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem. And as Jesus foretold, the generation that heard his words did not pass away until all the things he foretold about Jerusalem’s destruction had occurred. (***Matthew 24:34***)

However, the destruction of Jerusalem was not followed by the return of Jesus. What happened? We know Jesus would not lie or mislead, so had the Bible writers misunderstood Jesus’ words? Instead of re-examining their recollection and understanding of what occurred that evening on the Mount, the early Christians presumed Jesus’ prophecies had a greater fulfillment at which time surely Jesus would return and establish his kingdom on earth.

(*Acts 1:6*) It does not appear that they considered the possibility that Jesus would return at a time that would be separate and distinct from any other prophetic event.

More than 60 years after Jesus' ascension, the Apostle John, the only then-living Apostle, wrote what came to be known as the *Gospel of John*, and the books *1 John*, *2 John*, *3 John*, and *Revelation*. Due to their expectation of a greater fulfillment of Jesus' earlier prophecies, John's *Revelation* has been linked to the prophecies concerning Jerusalem's destruction and the second coming of Jesus at which time there will be a greater tribulation culminating in a decisive war of God against disobedient mankind, followed by a period of peace, another terrible war, and finally a lasting peace. But there are other interpretations.

Other Christians do not link Revelation with the second coming. They believe the prophecy has already been chiefly fulfilled in the past, primarily with the destruction of Rome. Some believe the prophecy is an overview of history and major historical events, including a few they believe will occur in the future. Still others believe the prophecy is spiritual, representing higher and larger ideas and ideals which are equally relevant in all ages and for all people. While we do believe there will be endings and beginnings of eras and dispensations, we are more inclined to view *Revelation* as a spiritual prophecy, but we are open to additional possibilities.

And we firmly believe in Jesus' promise that he will someday return. The Apostle John confirmed this as recorded in his gospel account which was written in 98 C.E., well after the destruction of Jerusalem, and two years after he wrote *Revelation*. John recorded Jesus as saying:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come back and take you to be with me** that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

– *John 14:1-4*

Here, Jesus does not link his second coming to any cataclysmic event. He simply states that he will come again and will receive us. Therefore, while we can rest assured that Jesus will return one day to our earth, we should be cautious about emphatically linking it to any other event.

We provide this perspective and the alternative views because many are so immersed in their own interpretations of the book of *Revelation* that they forget they are **interpretations and opinions**, not established fact. The truth is that there are many and varied interpretations by sincere people who are just as diligently looking for understanding. No, the interpretations of *Revelation* are not settled, nor is it an absolute certainty that there will be a catastrophic end in our near future. In fact, since *Revelation* was given by 'the Prince of Peace' (*Revelation 1:1-2; Isaiah 9:6*), we wonder if the 'great day of God the Almighty' is more likely to be a productive rather than a destructive event. And when we think of what our brothers in Africa and the Middle East are **currently** experiencing, the literal 7-year tribulation of *Revelation* would be a relief!

The bottom line is that with prophecy, we never know exactly what they mean or when they will be fulfilled until that day actually arrives. We are expressly told as much:

“But about that day or hour **no one knows**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, **but only the Father.**” – *Matthew 24:36*

“He said to them: “**It is not for you to know** the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”” – *Acts 1:7*

While we can indulge in the occasional delight of speculation about prophecy, we must be careful not to crystalize their meanings. We can very easily keep these matters open and fluid as the world scene changes, while at the same time focusing on what we **can** know to be true, actual and factual – the plain and open teachings of Jesus.

### The Fruits of Eschatology

In spite of the instability and fluidity of prophecy, many Christian preachers spend a significant amount of time calculating the end and explaining their interpretations of prophecies to their congregations and churches. They highlight various world events and use them as evidence for their conclusions. They develop ‘Bible Codes’ and eschatological charts apparently to expose God’s timetable and, in essence, steal the information that God has refused to voluntarily reveal.

But is it reasonable to believe that God would plant codes in the Bible to reveal information that Jesus emphatically said God would not reveal? Is it reasonable to believe that Jesus mis-spoke about the Father’s decision not to reveal that information? Can man out-think or out-maneuver God? Hardly! Yet this is exactly what the study of eschatology presumes. And it is exactly this type of gamesmanship that colors the Bible as a puzzle or an enigma, instead of what it is, a straightforward revelation of the highest truth of the day.

But why the obsession with end times rather than with the plain and open teachings? We believe it is because many Christians leaders equate prophecy with ‘the deep things of God’ (*1 Corinthians 2:10; Romans 11:33*), and believe that those who understand prophecy are those who have received personal divine revelation. Interpreters of prophecy manufacture in people a crippling need to continue coming to such ‘prophets’ for information, insight and salvation, and pledging to them their loyalty and material resources. The plain and open teachings cannot be manipulated for that purpose. So, they brush past the plain and open teachings, seeing them as elementary doctrines suitable for spiritual babes, and unsuitable for their purposes.

However, the plain and open teachings empower the individual. They emphasize that we are sons of God and heirs to the heavenly kingdom. (*Galatians 3:26; Romans 8:17*) Once we realize and accept our anointing as sons, we are no longer under the tutelage and control of men:

“What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. **The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.** So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, **God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s**

**child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.” – Galatians 4:1-7**

Once we accept the plain and open teachings, the Spirit of Truth takes over our education:

**“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”**  
– *John 16:13*

**“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.”**  
– *1 John 2:27*

Unfortunately, there are many so-called Christian teachers and preachers who are making a name for themselves as would merchants and businessmen. The diluted ministry of today is a watered down approach to the greatness of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. His magnificence is pushed aside in favor of self-glorifying prophetic interpretations. Instead of promoting the surpassing love of the Christ and the glorious heavenly career, they promote fear of the future and anoint themselves as the only means for salvation. Instead of reaching out to their brothers in loving and faithful service, they separate themselves as a special chosen people, judging all others who do not share their views as deserving of destruction.

Focusing on prophetic interpretations causes one to become overly concerned about preserving their physical lives. Jesus counseled against that:

**“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, **do not worry about tomorrow**, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”** – *Matthew 6:31-34*

It causes one to be fearful of the future and the symbolic characters depicted in the prophecy. But Jesus said:

**“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”**– *Matthew 10:28*

These people have forgotten the significance of their baptism. They forget that by their baptism, they have already died as to this world and have given up their earthly life so that they may attain to the heavenly resurrection:

**“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as**

Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, **we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.**” – *Romans 6:3-5*

This is why Paul counseled:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.** For you died, and **your life is now hidden** with Christ in God.”  
– *Colossians 3:1-3*

Our secular life on earth may be concerned with physical things, but when we come together in a Christian fellowship, our focus should be on our spiritual lives and things that will help us to attain our heavenly goals. That is the purpose of the plain and open teachings. The Christian writings provide the foundation for the plain and open teachings, but the spirit expands and deepens our understanding by adding meanings and values to those simple concepts.

“What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, **not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit**, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because **they are discerned only through the Spirit**. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” **But we have the mind of Christ.**”  
– *1 Corinthians 2:12-16*

As we have demonstrated time and time again on this site, the plain and open teachings have tremendous depth of which modern man has only scratched the surface. There are so many things that need to be discussed in a Christian fellowship to build up our most holy faith that there is no need to resort to the ever changing, unreliable prophetic interpretations of men. Rather than spending our time on matters that we simply cannot know for a certainty, or resting our eternal future to the vacillating interpretations of men, we should be focusing on the things we **can** know – the actual, factual matters contained in the plain and open teachings of Jesus.

### **What Does It Matter?**

A review of Bible prophecy does indicate that there will be an end of an age or a system of things, though it is not clear how that will actually occur. But, as mentioned above, to a baptized Christian, the end of the age or the end of the system of things has little importance because he has already given up his earthly life.

We know that when we are called to lay down our life struggle and pass through the portal of death, we will thereafter stand in the immediate presence of judgment and be face to face with the facts of a new dispensation of service in the heavens. What the whole world

must face as a literal fact at the sometime end of an age, we, as individuals, will most certainly face as a personal experience when we reach the end of our natural life.

The downfall of nations, the crash of empires, the end of an age, even the end of the world, have little to do with one who believes in the gospel of the kingdom that we are all sons of God who have hidden our lives in the surety of the eternal kingdom. All who are God-knowing and gospel-believing have already received the assurances of eternal life. (See **Everlasting Life Now!**) Since our lives are being lived in the spirit and for the Father, nothing can be of serious concern to us. The Father's kingdom cannot be disturbed or distorted by earthly upheavals or planetary cataclysms. As Jesus said:

**“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” – Matthew 6:20**

Each of us should carry on our work in view of the possible return of the Son of Man exactly as each of us carries forth our lifework in view of the inevitable and ever-impending natural death. When we have by faith once established ourselves as a son of God, nothing else matters as regard the surety of survival. However, we must ever keep in mind that having once accepted our sonship will not save us in the face of the knowing and persistent rejection of those same truths which have to do with progressively bearing spiritual fruit. At any time, we can desert the Father and our ministry if we so choose. Therefore, it is important for us to consider Peter's words:

**“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.” – 2 Peter 3:11-12**

The focus should be on our 'holy acts of conduct' and our 'deeds of godly devotion,' matters that are the crux of the plain and open teachings of Jesus. We should be working toward the mandate:

**“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”  
– Matthew 5:48**

Holy acts of conduct are the things we do that honor the Father and our relationship with Him and our brothers. They can be ministry-related like teaching the plain and open teachings, or they can be secular-related like showing kindness to a stranger. (*Luke 10:30-37*) Note Jesus' words:

**“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” – Luke 6:31**

**“Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.” – Mark 9:41**

**“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” – Matthew 7:1-2**

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” – *Matthew 18:21-22*

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”  
– *Matthew 25:35-40*

These are the types of things that demonstrate how far we have come in our appreciation of the plain and open teachings. And the more we spread the Father’s good will through our words and conduct, the more enemies we turn into friends, and consequently, the fewer souls to be lost in an end time adjudication. We will discuss the holy acts and godly deeds in more detail in our next article, **Go About Doing Good.**

Prophetic interpretations as they are currently presented serve to divide us in fear; whereas the plain and open teachings unite us in faith. Prophetic interpretations puff one up with self-importance; whereas the plain and open teachings build one another up in love. Prophetic interpretations emphasize calamity; whereas the plain and open teachings highlight peace. Prophetic interpretations presumptuously judge the world; whereas the plain and open teachings can save the world.

So really, what is better – presuming to know the interpretations of prophecy, or knowing the plain and open teachings of Jesus? Which one will make a positive difference in your life and the lives of others? Which one leads to your eternal salvation?

When we live our physical lives by faith in the life and ministry of Jesus and in loving service for one another, we can confidently look forward to the next step in the eternal career with the same survival faith that carried us through our first earthly adventure in sonship with God.

No, we have no idea when Jesus will fulfill his promise to return or when we will be faced with the end of an age. Jesus may appear on earth any day, and he may not come until age after age has passed. But no matter. Each one of us is destined to see him and it is of no serious concern whether we go to him or he chances first to come to us. Whatever the world conditions, we should be ever ready to welcome him on earth as he stands ready to welcome us in heaven.

And, of course, we welcome your comments.

*“Elaia Luchnia”*

