

Last Days

*Dennis
Peacocke*



GoStrategic

1221 Farmers Lane

Suite E, Santa Rosa, CA 95405

800-700-0605 | 707-578-7700

info@gostrategic.org

GoStrategic (Formerly Strategic Christian Services)

Founded in 1979 by Dennis Peacocke who serves as President, GoStrategic is a prophetic ministry committed to training and equipping leaders of every cultural sphere in discipling nations and transforming the world. GoStrategic operates internationally, educating Christians through our Business Leadership School and Strategic Life Training correspondence schools, events, educational products, networking, and consulting services. Our ministry headquarters are based in Santa Rosa, California, with affiliates and schools in Mexico, Central and South America, Europe, Asia, and New Zealand.

GoStrategic equips believers to be leaders in the communities where they live, work, and serve. We specialize in bridging the gap between spiritual truth and the practical implementation of those truths in confronting real-world problems. With over three decades of experience educating, modeling, and connecting like-minded individuals, we have seen first-hand the fruit of Christians applying Biblical principles to the most complex challenges. It is our sincere hope that the services we provide result in thousands of communities transformed as believers step in to rebuild, repair, and restore our world. To learn more, please visit our website: www.gostrategic.org

A former business owner, Dennis Peacocke is the founder and president of GoStrategic, a Christian leadership organization dedicated to demonstrating the relevance of Christianity to every area of contemporary life. He has authored four books: *On the Destiny of Nations*, *Winning the Battle for the Minds of Men*, *Doing Business God's Way*, and *The Emperor Has No Clothes*, as well as recorded numerous audio and video presentations.

Dennis and his wife Jan reside in Santa Rosa, California. They have three adult children and eleven grandchildren.

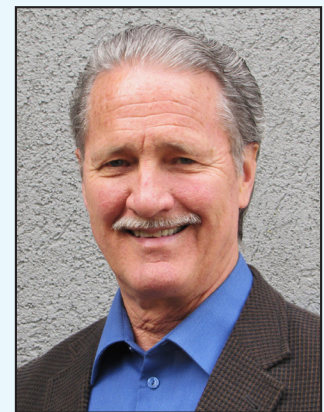


TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEALING WITH THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Our Introduction: The Issue is Why More than When 7

Issue One: The Gospel of the Church on Earth 11

Issue Two: The Church Must Midwife New Believers 13

BUILDING OUR LIVES FOR THE LONG HAUL

Issue Three: The Church Must Become a Witness and Instrument of Judgment 17

Issue Four: The Church Must Prepare Herself for the Coming of Age 21

“DEALING WITH THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST”

OUR INTRODUCTION: THE ISSUE IS WHY MORE THAN WHEN

BY Dennis Peacocke

I. **Let us first set out some goals for this seminar and our basic presuppositions**

- A. Our goals for this seminar are as follows:
 - 1. To help ground you in a biblical perspective relative to Christ's second coming and issues related to it.
 - 2. To help motivate and instruct you how to serve Christ more effectively because of this knowledge.
 - 3. To enjoy our God together and worship Him as part of His eternal family!
- B. Our basic presuppositions for our discussions relative to the subject at hand are these:
 - 1. God's purposes precede and undergird His actions: teleology precedes eschatology. Why precedes when (Ps. 103:7).
 - 2. If you do not understand why Christ is returning, the when of His return is more a matter of rescue and defeat for the Church than a "blessed hope."
 - 3. As the millennium changes, spiritual and material chaos is likely; being biblically grounded in truth will allow you to serve the saved and unsaved as a reference point for God's purposes and goodness.
- C. Some of the challenges facing us as we attempt to achieve the goals are listed here:
 - 1. Our preconceived ideas about how we approach this subject, and possibly some of our prior instruction in these issues.
 - 2. The pressure of contrasting opinions both in the world ("we're in control here"), and in the Church ("the issue is when").
 - 3. I have not taught on this subject since August of 1976!

II. **The question is "why" before "when": Christ's return deals with ultimate issues.**

- A. As we have already noted, God's purposes precede His actions because, by His very nature, He is strategic (Rev. 13:8; Acts 17:26; 2:23).
 - 1. God does nothing without a purpose.
 - 2. The question then becomes obvious: How will Christ's return fulfill Father's purposes for Him and for His Church?
 - 3. The next question becomes, "What are Christ's purposes for the Church on the earth prior to His return, and when will they be completed?"
 - 4. These are ultimate questions which, if not addressed, make study of prophecy a "crap shoot" of chance at best, and a playground for fools at worst.

III. What assignments has the Father given Christ which He must achieve through His body on earth prior to His wedding with her (Rev. 19:7, 21:2,9)?

- A. Here are the "headlines" with whole scores of related scriptures which, in God's Word, support them:
 - 1. Father has a destiny, purpose, and inheritance for Himself in Christ's people (ekklesia) (Eph. 1:18-23).
 - 2. At the end of earth's current history, Christ will return for His prepared bride and deliver her up to the Father for a gift and dwelling place (1 Cor. 15:22-28; Rev. 21:3; Isa. 25:8-9).
 - 3. Before Christ can leave His throne to return (Ps. 110:1-3), Father's purposes for the Church must first be accomplished.
- B. Let us look then at Father's primary purposes for His earthly family (John 3:3).
 - 1. Father's highest goal for His children is that they inherit His heart. In order to do so, believers must:
 - a. Learn to think as He thinks (Christian worldview).
 - b. Learn to relate as He relates (koinonia).
 - c. Learn to live as He lives (strategic living).
 - d. Learn to embrace His method of maturing us (rulership training through obedience, training and pressure).
 - e. See that exalting Christ is the door to His heart.
 - 2. In order to think as He thinks, believers must break the curse of single-generational living.
 - a. The Church won't depart in disobedience, and we must definitely break the curse of Malachi 4:4-6. "Rapture fever" is the antithesis of obedience to building generationally.
 - b. Since Christ lives to obey His Father and empower His brethren (Heb. 2 all), then living to maximize blessing and avoid hardship is a non-Christian concept and cannot be a presupposition upon which to build our eschatology! Question: Has the Church fulfilled this expectation?
 - 3. Father's heart is that we would be used by Him to complete His earthly family (Heb. 2:10; Eph. 3:14,15) and live like His family (John 17:20-21) on earth before Christ returns.
 - a. We are to embody and carry His life to the world.
 - b. We are to build on the "sonship model" (1 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 4:4).
 - c. Question: Has the Church fulfilled this expectation?
 - 4. Father's heart is that we learn to distinguish between His shared wealth and shared riches, and that we learn to steward both of them effectively.

- a. "Wealth" is God's wisdom, character, knowledge, and power granted to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit, His people, and the "school of earth life."
- b. "Riches" are the physical resources given to us to steward (time, money, position, etc.).
- c. Wealth will pass through death, but riches will not (1 Cor. 3:14,15).
- d. There are more parables dealing with stewardship than any other subject in the New Testament.

Question: Has the Church fulfilled this expectation?

5. Father's heart is that the Church would learn to master these stewardship skills "wisdom"=skills;"instruction"=discipline) on earth before we graduate to the work of the next age.

a. We are to inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5); be "salt and light" (Matt. 5:13); be a "city set on a hill" (Matt. 5:14); "occupy until He returns" (Luke 19:13); "rule in the midst of our enemies" (Ps. 110:1-3); display the light of God globally (Isa. 60:1-5), and scores of similar assignments.

b. To "graduate us" before we have achieved these goals would be to harvest a premature crop and unbiblical (Matt. 13:30).

Question: Has the Church fulfilled this expectation?

6. Father's heart is that Christ's bride will be a companion-ruler for Him to liberate the cosmos and "fill it in" (Rom. 8:17-22).

a. We begin on earth (Gen. 1:26-28).

b. Christ's return signals our graduation (Rev. 2:26-27).

Question: Has the Church fulfilled this expectation?

- C. Any other basic approach takes us into confusion, absurdity, or apathy.

1. If you don't know why, you can't discern when.

2. Here, for example, are some of the absurdities floating around

a. There are three second comings: to rapture the saints; to land on earth before the millennium; to leave and return again after the millennium.

b. Christ's enemies will attack Him with bombs and guns in Jerusalem.

c. God will punish the evil people for seven years as a "warm-up" for their eternal punishment.

d. Satan will have to play his "ace" (the anti-Christ) against today's "deuce" Church. Long-range planning (education, inheritance building, etc.) is foolish.

ISSUE ONE: THE GOSPEL OF THE CHURCH ON EARTH

BY Dennis Peacocke

I. Here are the presuppositions undergirding this teaching:

- A. God does not reward disobedience, nor will He return until His Church has completed her earthly assignments.
- B. "Hard times" or the world-systems' attacks against the Church cannot force God's hand to prematurely remove the Church.
- C. Jesus said the Church would overcome hell's gates (Matt. 16:18); and that the Kingdom of God will leaven the earth (Matt. 13:33) and become a place of refuge for the nations (Matt. 13:31-32).
- D. Jesus said that "this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come" (Matt. 24:14).

II. If the end cannot come until "this gospel of the Kingdom... be preached to the world as a witness" (something seen and heard), the question then becomes what is "this gospel of the Kingdom"?

- A. Since we cannot, in this conference, attempt to fully answer this question, let us simply give some of the major characteristics of "this gospel of the Kingdom" which Christ Himself taught.
 - 1. It is a message of continuity, beginning in the Old Testament and further developed in the New Testament (Matt. 13:52; 5:17-19; Heb. 13:8).
 - 2. This gospel (kyrigma) focuses on man caring (kooreo) (Gen. 1:26-28) for the earth under God's universal laws (Matt. 4:4).
 - 3. In order to fulfill these laws, man must be "born again" (Jer. 31:31-33; Ezek. 36:26-27; John 3:3,5), and he must be discipled by members of God's eklessia (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:8-16).
 - 4. As God's "junior partners" (Rom. 8:17-20) go forth in obedience to care for the earth, bringing God's will to bear on all that man is and does, God's Kingdom comes to earth through His servants (Matt. 6:10).
 - 5. Man is to seek this Kingdom and God's righteousness above all other endeavors (Matt. 6:33), coming to the point where its value precedes all other values (Matt. 13:44-46).
 - 6. God's children are not "born again" to go to heaven but rather to see and labor within God's Kingdom (John 3:3,5; Matt. 11:12).
 - 7. This Kingdom is not something that will be established, but rather something Christ already established (Dan. 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 7:13; 14,18,27; Matt. 3:2; Luke 11:20).
 - 8. The King (Christ) is not going to receive power over this Kingdom on earth:

He already has all power on earth to establish His Kingdom (Matt. 11:27; 28:18-20; Rev. 11:15; Isa. 9:6-7).

9. The end will not occur until the "sons of the Kingdom" (Matt. 13:38) come to the maturity of harvest (Matt. 13:20), at which point the unsaved tares will be "raptured" first (Matt. 13:30, 39-43, 49) before the living saints will meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-18). By the way, this "rapture" will be no secret!

- Christ will shout: 1 Thess. 4:15•The archangel will shout: 1 Thess. 4:15
- The trumpet of God will sound: 1 Thess. 4:15; 1 Cor. 15:52
- The millions of dead in Christ will fly out of the earth: 1 Thess. 4:15
- He comes like lightning from east to west with noise and great fanfare: Matt. 24:27-31

B. In much of the evangelical church, this is not the gospel being preached.

1. People are being "born again" to seek heaven, not the Kingdom.
2. People are peacefully coexisting with the kingdom of this world, rather than trying to aggressively raise up an alternative Kingdom in every area of life.

As Jesus said, the nations await the witness and demonstration of a Kingdom gospel before the end shall come. Christ didn't say the Church would "take over the earth" before He returned, rather He said we'd bear witness to the power (leaven) of His Kingdom rule in obedience, love, and supernatural demonstration of the power of eternity invading the "now."

III. How then do we attempt to explain how godly men and women have fallen prey to "another gospel" than that which is focused on Christ's Kingdom claims upon the earth?

- A. We quickly examine Satan's master strategy of "stalling, stealing, and provoking."
 1. Satan (the great opposer) has mastered the technique of asking questions which lead to independence from God's placement and assignments.
 2. We see this strategy being used by him in both the spirit world (Jude, vs. 6) and against man here on earth (Gen. 3:1,4,5).
- B. This strategy is designed to nullify God's reign through His servants, create a void that Satan can fill through his servants, and provoke God to destructive anger against His people (Num. 14:21).
 1. This spirit is a spirit of "apostasy." It lures people into deserting their post.
 2. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of "occupation" (Luke 19:13), not surrender and indifference.
 3. Let us now pray together against this spirit of apostasy in us, the Church, and the world.

ISSUE TWO: THE CHURCH MUST MIDWIFE NEW BELIEVERS

BY Dennis Peacocke

I. Here are the presuppositions undergirding this teaching:

- A. God uses His servants to do much of His Kingdom work on earth. The saints are Christ's earthly "scepter" (Ps. 110:2) through which He rules.
- B. Christ also uses His servants to help birth or "midwife" new family members (Rom. 10:13-17).
- C. Christ is not returning until every member of the Church is born upon the earth and adopted into His family.

II. The Lord lives in the "paradox" of the tension between His predetermined, sovereign choices and the immediacy of His moment-by-moment involvement with us.

- A. God's family was determined since the foundations of the world.
 - 1. The "book of life" has had all the names of God's elect in it since before Adam and Eve were created (Rev. 13:8, 17:8).
 - 2. The revealed truth of God's foreknowledge and election of who is and is not a family member is clearly taught in scripture (Prov. 16:4; Matt. 22:14; John 1:13; 6:39,44,65; 10:29; Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 2:8, among many).
- B. The invitation to "come unto Me" (Matt. 11:28) nevertheless remains an open invitation to all men, apparently with only the elect choosing to come and stay on the journey.
 - 1. However the tension between God's sovereign election And man's free will ultimately works, the family members of God are nevertheless responsible to help find the rest of God's family by hunting them down through preaching, demonstrating, and embodying the life of the Kingdom, which is the mark of the family.
 - 2. Christ will not return until every family member is born and found, and every P.O.W. is set free!

III. As "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19), let us now briefly discuss the hunt for our missing family members.

- A. The first method of hunting is one-on-one.
 - 1. We hunt by looking for who and where Father is working (John 5:17,19,20,30) as revealed by our attentiveness to the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. As St. Francis of Assisi is reported to have said, "Preach the gospel at all times, and use words if necessary."
- B. The second method is more a public declaration directed at many individuals.
 - 1. It may be the words and works of an evangelist.

2. It may be the declarations of a prophet which carry "God-breathed" speech (Jonah 3:5).
- C. The third method is the demonstration of God's blessing due to obedience (1 King:10 all) or display of supernatural power (Acts 2 all).
 1. Israel was to be a witness to the world as a showpiece of the benefits of obeying the one true God (Deut. 4:6,7; Matt. 5:14).
 2. Signs and wonders are obvious "pointers" for lost family members on how to find their way home.
- D. The fourth method is undergirding all others, namely, intercessory prayer.
 1. We are to intercede for individuals, seeking their release (Matt. 18:18-20).
 2. We are to pray for cultural authority figures who will then create a climate conducive to the salvation process for citizens of that community (1 Tim. 2:1-4).
- E. The fifth method is to build nations on a social law base which is biblical, and therefore, enables the Holy Spirit to bring conviction on a cultural level.
 1. God's law is a "schoolmaster" to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24; Rom. 7:7).
 2. To disciple a nation (Matt. 28:18-20) and teach it to obey all that Christ taught (Matt. 4:4) is to create an atmosphere conducive to a massive exodus into God's family.
 3. The "salvation gospel" of many evangelicals has lamely missed the greatest social fulcrum of salvation, God's law (1 Tim. 1:5-11), because their focus is not Kingdom, that is, bringing all that man is and does under God's Word.
 4. We are to be to the nations a teacher, priest, and prophet, not simply an evangelist.

IV. In our search for our lost brothers and sisters, we must preach the same gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus did unless we have "a better idea" (Matt. 4:17).

- A. God has given us a tremendous gift to present to our generation because they have never heard the gospel of the Kingdom!
 1. We must preach a King, Lord, and Savior.
 2. We must preach an earth covered with justice, righteousness, and peace.
 3. We must preach that sin doesn't work (as evidenced by all that is in our culture), and that is why God hates it.
 4. We must preach a "third way," neither right nor left, but Kingdom.
 5. The public conversation is continually talking about the failure of their kingdom; where is our public conversation? We don't have to interrupt their concern for the earth; we must use it to speak of God's concern for all the earth!
- B. Jesus is coming in His Church as well as for His Church.
 1. Christ is maturing His bride, preparing her for Himself as a co-ruler (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7).
 2. The equipping of her people (Eph. 4:8-16) is an act of evangelism, obedi-

- ence, and the release of destiny.
3. The Church is a corporate representation of the Master; as it works, He works through her.
- C. The Father has placed His sons under the tutorship of life on earth in a fallen world (Gal. 4:1-4).
1. When Christ returns, it signals that Father's training time for us is completed for now. Satan is no longer useful to Him; he will be dismissed.
 2. The Church will be ready for a new environment. We will be given a "new heaven and earth" (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1) as the Father's dowry gift to His Son. The bride will enter this new earth, coming down the aisle of heaven to the altar of earth, to be married to the Lamb and hold an eternal feast and eternal building project (Rev. 21:2).

“BUILDING OUR LIVES FOR THE LONG HAUL”
ISSUE THREE: THE CHURCH MUST BECOME A WITNESS AND
INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT
BY Dennis Peacocke

I. Here are the presuppositions undergirding this teaching:

- A. Until the Church is obedient enough (2 Cor. 10:6), mature enough, and courageous enough to judge the earth (1 Cor. 6:1-8), Christ will not return.
- B. What is a “blessed hope” for us (Christ’s return, because we have finished the family work and preparations) is the beginning of hell for the rebellious.

II. Let us quickly review what we have established in our teaching so far.

- A. God’s purposes precede and undergird His actions: teleology precedes eschatology. Why precedes when (Ps. 103:7).
- B. If you do not understand why Christ is returning, the when of His return is more a matter of rescue and defeat for the Church than a “blessed hope.”
- C. As the millennium changes, spiritual and material chaos is likely; being biblically grounded in truth will allow you to serve the saved and unsaved as a reference point for God’s purposes and goodness.
- D. God does not reward disobedience, nor will He return until His Church has completed her earthly assignments.
- E. “Hard times” or the world-systems’ attacks against the Church cannot force God’s hand to prematurely remove the Church.
- F. Jesus said the Church would overcome hell’s gates (Matt. 16:18), that the Kingdom of God will leaven the earth (Matt. 13:33) and become a place of refuge for the nations (Matt. 13:31-32).
- G. God uses His servants to do much of His Kingdom work on earth. The saints are Christ’s earthly “scepter” (Ps. 110:2) through which He rules.
- H. Christ also uses His servants to help birth or “midwife” new family members (Rom. 10:13-17).
- I. Christ is not returning until every member of the Church is born upon the earth and adopted into His family.

III. At the heart of eschatological problems is our “welfare and vacation syndrome” mentality. Our eschatology is based more upon our fallen human hearts than our renewed spiritual minds!

- A. Natural Israel is a good picture of spiritual Israel (the Church, Rom. 2:29). Remember, the natural precedes the spiritual (1 Cor. 15:46; Luke 16:10-12).

1. Israel wanted out of Egypt but not into the Promised Land, once they discovered it meant war, work, and risk (Num. 13-14).
 2. Much of the Church seems to have the same attitude. Our Moses (Christ and His Exodus, Luke 9:31) has the same challenges, and we have opted for life in the wilderness with an occasional skirmish with the enemies and obstacles!
 3. Christ does not need or want us in heaven prematurely; He wants us to successfully man our occupation stations here (John 17:15).
- B. Because the mind justifies what the heart has chosen, we don't have a theology problem as much as we have a heart problem.
1. Hebrews Eleven is a Jewish believer's call to spiritual arms to his Jewish brethren.
 2. Paul's life, his greatest "gospel," is an equally clear call to all believers.
- ⇒ 3. I personally believe that the primary reason that the message of Christ's Kingdom is ignored, attacked, dismissed, or down-played, is more about enjoying Pharaoh's favor than a problem of hermeneutics relative to our evangelical eschatology. We want a truce with the world system because it's more comfortable, "reasonable," and safe.

IV. The Church is called to judge and rule the earth, as we have already seen.

- A. God doesn't allow His people to "skip grades." All maturity is systematic (Isa. 28:10) and progressive/incremental.
1. Natural Israel, though the whole Promised Land was theirs, was commanded to take it, little by little (Deut. 7:22; Josh. 3:1).
 2. The Church has been given the earth to rule (Matt. 5:5). This ownership, though already released to us, must follow God's method of incremental, growing responsibility (Luke 16:10-12).
 3. Unprepared sons (Luke 15:11-32) squander their inheritance. Wise fathers train them before they release them (Gal. 4:1-4).
 4. All good stewards, saved or unsaved, practice progressive release of responsibility.
- B. Our judgment operates primarily out of our obedience as "salt and light," far more than by attempting to "take over the earth from secular society." Remember, both the wheat and tares will come to maturity together (Matt. 13:30; Rev. 22:11).
1. Our "salt" is our obedience to Christ.
 - a. It preserves us against God's judgments.
 - b. It stings in wounds of disobedience to all others.
 - c. It is a witness which precedes God's judgment upon the unsaved. Noah, Lot, the prophets, and Christ are all examples of this on a macro level. On a micro level is the individual power of our obedient lives to those around us.

2. Our "light" is our obedience to Christ as well.
 - a. It fulfills all the issues listed above for "salt."
 - b. It exposes sin and darkness, leaving no "cloak of excuse" (John 15:22).
 - c. It also stands as a point of separation between the two families, the two kingdoms, allowing God to demonstrate His blessing on one and sanctions against the other (Ex. 10:22-23; Isa. 60:1-5; Rev. 9:4).
- C. Our ultimate judgment against the world is the Kingdom witness (Matt. 24:14) of a church society, resolving within itself the challenges and obstacles that the kingdom of this world cannot solve. Through obedience to the Word, the Holy Spirit, and spiritual authority:
 1. Our health is to be a witness.
 2. Our love for life is to be a witness.
 3. Our marriages are to be a witness.
 4. Our sexual fulfillment is to be a witness.
 5. Our parent-child relationships are to be a witness.
 6. Our ethnic relationships are to be a witness.
 7. Our male-female relationships are to be a witness.
 8. Our stewardship and prosperity are to be a witness.
 9. Our love for each other is to be a witness.
 10. Our care for the sick, aged, and needy is to be a witness.
 11. Our concern for the environment is to be a witness.
 12. Our full employment is to be a witness.
 13. Our skill and excellence in the arts are to be a witness.
 14. Our craftsmanship is to be a witness.
 15. Our Christian justice is to be a witness.
 16. In short, our entire lives and Christian community are to be a witness and a standing measurement against which the world can judge itself.
- D. Perhaps the greatest indictment against us is the fact that the Church largely relies upon the civil government to insure and provide these benefits to us.
 1. We tend to preach Jesus as Saviour and our heavenly Provider, and let Pharaoh and his kingdom be our earthly provider.
 2. Perhaps we should repent. Let's pray together: for each other, God's mercy, and the Body of Christ.

ISSUE 4: THE CHURCH MUST PREPARE HERSELF FOR THE COMING AGE

BY Dennis Peacocke

I. These are the presuppositions undergirding this teaching:

- A. The very stresses and pressures we often seek to escape, especially at Christ's second coming, are the very instruments He uses to mature us so that He can return (or prepare us to die "matured" and go to be with Him).
- B. Father has commissioned the Church to be a witness of the goodness and severity of God (Rom.11:22)—to men, angels, and devils—before He closes history.
- C. We believe that the Scripture teaches an eschatology of victory (not triumphalism) because the blessed hope of Christ's return testifies to the fulfillment of our tasks of service to God and man.

II. Like it or not, the pressures of obedience and extending God's Kingdom against the kingdom of this world are what prepares and qualifies us to rule and reign with Christ. Remember, the book of Revelation begins with seven promises to those who overcome life's challenges.

- A. The purpose of pressure in Christ is to produce godly integrity.
 - 1. Integrity can be defined as the constancy of specific attributes regardless of the surrounding environment. Jesus exemplifies integrity; He revealed virtue and dignity regardless of the pressures upon Him.
 - 2. Scripture often discusses God's purposes for pressure and conflict upon His people:
 - a. To prepare us for yet greater pressure—"Now it came about when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, 'Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt'" (Ex. 13:17).
 - b. To test our obedience -"*Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly). These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites, the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses*" (Judges 3:1-4).
 - c. To produce godly character—"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not

disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Rom. 5:3-5).

d. To develop in us Kingdom attributes—"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard, that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord" (2 Peter 2:4-11).

e. To purify us—"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you...If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:12, 14-17).

3. Our eschatology cannot be based on our pressures or suffering. Let me remind you what my brother in Czechoslovakia said to me some years ago: "We are already in the tribulation of the saints."

B. We should expect, not the imminent return of Christ, but rather major social disruptions as the world system proves increasingly unable to deliver what it promises.

1. Because sin doesn't work, the judgment we are already experiencing must increase.

2. Because only a small portion of the Church seemingly wants to or understands its assignment, we can expect significant pressures upon us to focus us to reconsider our current escapist eschatology.

⇒ 3. We will all likely have the opportunity in our lifetimes to demonstrate the

assumptions we hold as to why, and therefore when, Christ is returning. Will it be "fight or flight," "service or nervous"?

III. We are all in kind of a cosmic drama observed by a "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) which is designed by God to prove Him worthy of following or not.

- A. In this cosmic drama we are battling for His honor and our dignity.
 - 1. Are we following Him for the "loaves and fishes," which Job's story shows us all (Job 1:9-10)?
 - 2. Has Christ truly put enough of Himself into His children to make them think and act like Him?
 - 3. This is what the drama is about more than God being big, tough, smart, and right.
- B. In this drama, we are all receiving an everlasting history lesson.
 - 1. God's way is always best; any other way leads to death and destruction.
 - 2. Making choices for the long run is always best; we reap what we sow, for good or ill.
 - 3. People will go to hell because of their nature, not just their actions. They will continue to isolate and destroy forever.
 - 4. When Christ does return, there will be no repeat of the rebellion either sought or permitted (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 20:14-15).

IV. Let us close with some glimpses of eternity for which the Church is preparing.

- A. It will be upon the earth (Ps. 115:116; Rev. 21 all).
 - 1. The nations will exist, needing to be completed or "healed" since the world was not perfect when Christ returned (Rev. 22:1-3; Rev. 21:23-26).
 - 2. Those nations will be run by prepared believers (Rev. 2:26-27) and their cities by prepared "mayors" (Luke 19:11-27).
 - 3. The challenges we will face, if any, will be of growth, not man's sin (Rev. 22:14-15).
 - 4. Father will "fill all things" (Eph. 1:23), whatever that means, through the Church.
 - 5. The Church will be used to heal and restore the entire universe. (Rom. 8:17-23).
 - 6. Whatever work we did on earth that was eternal in nature will be waiting for us as an investment (Matt. 6:19-20; 1 Cor. 3:12-15).
 - 7. Spiritual family will continue (Eph. 3:14-15) and relational investments will be of supreme value.
 - 8. Our incorruptible bodies may allow us to fulfill some of our fantasies about what we could have done or would have done if we weren't too busy or too poor!
- B. In summary then, we return to "the blessed hope" of Christ's return.

1. He is coming back.
2. He is coming back because we're ready, not because times got tough, the devil controlled the planet, or God was pushed into judging His Church because it wouldn't do what He wanted.
3. Numbers 14:11 will be fulfilled: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?'"
4. God's will and Kingdom, in full bloom, will come with Him.
5. It will be better than we can possibly imagine (Rom. 8:18, 2 Cor. 4:17).
6. All the work, sacrifice, and warfare will have been worth it because the Church will have been used to glorify God in a fallen world. Even so, come Lord Jesus...when we're ready to graduate!