



START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

What is your favorite TV show and why? Prepare to defend your answer as to why it is the best show.

SHARE

Welcome to our teaching series called “Off The Record.”

Have you ever wondered about certain topics that never seem to be talked about in church? Topics that stand like elephants in the room, yet the church seems to shy away from? Many times we like to talk about these things ‘off the record,’ because we are either too afraid of what people might think of us or many times, we are not sure how to answer tough topics that are difficult to answer. As a church, we believe that we are accountable before God to bring the full counsel of the word of God and that we can’t shy away from the truth.

The truth is we are all broken, we all struggle and the life Jesus offers us is better; better than anything else the world offers. So during this series, we are going to be full of grace. Every one of us needs grace, and there is not one of us who should point a finger at another broken person, for we are all at the table of grace thanks to Jesus Christ. We will allow the word of God to speak to us and trust that even if we differ in opinion at times that we can trust the Holy Spirit to do what He does. It is the very spirit of God that will bring change and conviction, not a domineering argument.

This teaching series was specifically designed to answer your questions about God, the Bible and culture. We want to thank each of you for submitting your questions through our recent survey. Although we couldn’t answer all of them, we took the most commonly asked questions. The third most-asked question happened to be one that all of us could learn more about and that is...are we living in the end times?

From a biblical perspective, what really happens in the end? CNN and Time Magazine conducted a survey where over one-third of Americans believe that we are living in a biblical end times. So regardless of people’s background, there is a large amount of people who believe that the world’s problems are

getting worse, that evil is more rampant, and if there is a biblical end times; we may be in it.

This study of the end times or the last days is what we call, “eschatology” or the study of “the last things.” Eschatology studies the return of Christ, the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, the judgment of believers and unbelievers and eternal destinies. As believers, we should study the end times with anticipation of Christ’s coming; it is our great hope as believers. But, even believers are still filled with so many questions about the last days. If it makes you feel better, remember that Jesus’ very own disciples asked some of the exact same questions that we have today.

Let’s start by reading Matthew 24:3-35

Jesus deals with the disciples’ question, but is not specific at times. Jesus exhorts his followers to live responsibly, efficiently and courageously during these trials that are coming. If you read the entire answer to the disciples, which covers chapters 24 and 25, you realize Jesus focuses more on the fact that we should live with eternity in mind. Scripture records many signs of the end times, in fact 23 of 27 new testament books talk about some of those signs such as moral decline, natural disasters, increase in knowledge, persecution for faith, increase in sin, and the list goes on.

Can you relate to the disciples? Have you, at times, had questions for God, yet he seems to answer them in a different way than you might want?

From the list of end times signs in italics above, can you talk about some specific examples of each one that exist in our world today?

Which one seems to concern you the most and why?

Will Jesus’ second coming be in secret or be visible to everyone on earth?

GROW

Are we living in the end times? Maybe. We may think so, but we don’t get to know the day or hour as Jesus clearly said. Our human nature is to want to know the answers, so we can better plan our lives accordingly. But Jesus lets his followers know to live ready and responsibly, in light of eternity. The point is not knowing the exact time, but living without worry, knowing we are living rightly.

Matthew 24:36

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

So if we aren’t allowed to know the exact day or hour, does the Bible say anything about what will actually happen in the end times? As we mentioned before, we do know there is a great moral decline, wars, famines, increase in knowledge and natural disasters, persecution and the increase of sin that God will intervene in something called the rapture. There are many views on when this will occur. Scholars differ, but agree that the event is talked about in the Bible. The most common view that scholars believe is that the rapture will happen prior to the dreaded tribulation time. There are other scholars who believe this rapture will take place during the tribulation period, while still other scholars believe that this rapture of the church will take place post-tribulation. For the sake of consistency, we will walk through the pre-tribulation timeline in this study and would preface this with the fact that no person

knows for certain God's exact timing.

Let's read 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17

In K. Larson's commentary on I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon we find an order of this explained:

Paul then handed the readers a program of sorts, an order of service. Christ is coming, and this is how it will occur.

- The Lord, Christ himself, will come down.
- There will be a lot of noise.
- The dead believers will rise first.
- Christians who are still alive on earth will rise next.
- Everyone meets together with Christ in the air.
- Eternity begins at this point for those raptured.

Regardless of your view of when the rapture of believers will occur, there are a few significant things to be aware of that are important to understand:

Scripture tells us that there will be a great tribulation period of time. The tribulation period will begin with great promise; however, there will appear a one-world type government and many scholars believe only one global currency unit. There will be a great leader who will turn out in the end to not bring peace, but will reveal himself as what we is referred to as, 'the Anti-Christ.' The world will become so evil with the Anti-Christ in control that people will be begging to die. At the end of this period of time, there will come a great battle, a war like we have never seen before and a rider on a white horse will appear. This is the second coming of Christ, where he returns as Warrior-Messiah-King.

Let's read Revelation 19:11-16 and Revelation 20:1-15

What are the biggest differences between when Jesus first came to the world as an infant and his second return?

Jesus defeats Satan and takes his rightful place as the King of Kings on earth and reigns for one thousand years. Can you imagine a perfect, truthful, integrity-filled King on earth?

How should the understanding of God's finality of judgment encourage us all the more to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ with people?

MOVE

As we study the end times, it is easy to find disagreement about the meaning of some verses, times and imagery found in Revelation, but what is clear is that Christ is coming back. Just like the prophecies about Jesus' first coming to this earth as the Savior, Jesus will come back as he promised. As believers, that should not strike fear in us, but we should be encouraged and anticipate Christ's second coming. Let's find great strength and hope in God, that He would choose to use us and our stories and gifting to reach lost people during our lives here on earth.

1 Thessalonians 4:17,18

...and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Whether or not we are in the literal last days, the truth is, all of us are living in our last days. We all have only one life to live and our own days are short, like a breath. Although we don't know the exact time, we do know we are getting closer day by day.

As a believer, we will stand in front of Christ one day and we will give an account for how we lived our lives and how we handled stewardship of our God-given talents, resources, time and energy. God will judge our motives and the intentions of our hearts. Nothing will be hidden from God.

So let's not live with regrets here on earth. Knowing that we have been given much to use for God's glory should propel us to live the fullest lives, knowing that God sees all and will reward his children. Those difficulties and struggles that believers face for the cause of Jesus Christ will someday be recognized and rewarded. We serve a good and just God that sees, hears, responds and has promised to return. Be hugely encouraged. Be efficient with your time on earth. Be evangelistic. Be ready.

How does talking about the end times affect you? Does it make you want to change how you live your life?

God sees and will one day recognize and reward believers. How does knowing that God will set things right one day and recognize and reward change how we should live our lives? In what ways?

How does thinking about the end times change how you view sharing your faith with others?

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO

Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it. It is God's love that sent Jesus. You are loved.

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Additional reading:

Signs of the Times by Greg Laurie: What the Bible Says about the Rapture, Antichrist, Armageddon, Heaven, Hell, and Other Issues of Our Day

Heaven by Randy Alcorn

***We would also highly recommend when studying the Bible that you should find a solid study bible with notes. The NIV Study Bible or the ESV Study Bible, are both, excellent Bibles that have scholar notes, cultural content and timeline charts. This will change the way you read the Bible and help engage you into what is really happening as you read.**