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15“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17“Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18“Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19“But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20“But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 22“Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

We started our discussion last week about future things. Future events.

When I was a rebellious teen I declared myself an atheist. Like the rest of the world, the whole church and religion thing seemed like a colossal waste of time, with the exception that youth group held the possibility of meeting girls. (I married the first one that paid any attention).

I loved to argue belligerently like a fool and make christians miserable. But one thing kept nagging me in the back of my mind. I understood that this book contained prophetic utterances, many of which came true exactly as stated, hundreds of years after they were said. Some, thousands of years after they were said.

I had to admit prophecy, was real. I wanted to dismiss christianity and

it's book, but that thought nagged at me. How could men, prophets, describe events in detail, thousands of years before they happened. And since many of the prophecy's had come to pass, why would you believe the other things yet future would not. It was a problem.

Listen to God describe this attribute about Himself in Isaiah 46 as He compares Himself to the idols that men had made from gold and silver.

5 *"To whom would you liken Me
And make Me equal and compare Me,
That we would be alike?*

6 *"Those who lavish gold from the purse
And weigh silver on the scale
Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god;
They bow down, indeed they worship it.*

7 *"They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it;
They set it in its place and it stands there.
It does not move from its place.
Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer;
It cannot deliver him from his distress.*

8 *"Remember this, and be assured;
Recall it to mind, you transgressors.*

9 *"Remember the former things long past,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like Me,*

10 *Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things which have not been done,
Saying, 'My purpose will be established,
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';*

11 *Calling a bird of prey from the east,
The man of My purpose from a far country.
Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass.*

I have planned it, surely I will do it.

Declaring the end from the beginning.

This book is the sole source for the beginning. No one else was there. And yet God graciously describes the creation. How He formed the earth. How He spoke it into being, from nothing.

Evolution is NOT science. It is foolishness. It is a blatant rebellious rejection of a gracious God, and the truth He alone can reveal.

Only one person can describe the creation process. Only three persons were there. That's right, when you see the plural, let US . . . in the creation account, it's a conversation between the Trinity. The Triune God both caused the complexity of it all, and revealed to us, how it was done.

That's true about the beginning, and it's true about the end. *I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end, from the beginning.* Sovereign God rules over end things, just as He did over beginnings.

Now the disciples have asked Jesus to define something, and end time prophecy wasn't really on their mind, but that's what they got.

What they want to know is How is the Messianic Kingdom going to happen, if you're going away, and Israel is going to be laid waste?

We were so close. It was making sense. The march to Jerusalem with the King. They were picturing the takeover and Rome's destruction and the King reigning in Jerusalem.

Instead there was daily teaching about the Kingdom in the temple grounds, and increasing conflict with the rulers of Israel who were in power, until finally the declaration that the house of Israel would be laid waste. Made a desolation. And the King departs.

By the way, that was a prophetic statement that happened word for word

within less than 40 years. 20 - 20 hindsight for us. But back to the disciples question. How do we get from where we're at now, with the foregone conclusion that Israel is desolated, and the King has said He's departing, how do we get from here, to a glorious kingdom, in Jerusalem, on David's throne.

And the answer, again from 20-20 hindsight, we now know has spanned 20 centuries. The King has journeyed to a far country and is delaying there, but He will return and set up His glorious Kingdom.

What's that going to look like. Give us some signs to look for. And in this chapter, in not necessarily descending order, Jesus gives us some dioramas of those events.

He doesn't give us a You Tube with blow by blow ordered events, He gives us some open windows to look in at some of the different scenes.

Pam was born the year Disneyland opened, and both of us experienced the Magic Kingdom during it's first decade of existence. I recall that when you got weary from miles of walking and walking and walking, and it was time to go back to main street, you could get on the narrow guage train, and it would take you through dark tunnels that had dioramas depicting desert life, and other wonders.

Ferde Grofe's Grand Canyon Suite was playing in the background as you were transported through night time and morning, thunder storms and dreadful sunlight. And you'd look into those dioramas and it was very like being there.

The parallel I'm trying to get at is that these words aren't a blow by blow in logical descending order, rather they are window views of events leading up to the glorious return and reign of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem.

All of the dioramas have in common that they are something connected to that ultimate event. Satan deposed from rule over men on this earth, along with his chief cohorts, the anti-christ and the false prophet, and Jesus returning and reigning on earth.

The first picture window we'll look through this morning is this. The kingdom won't come quietly. The shorter the time Satan has to reign, the more furious he gets. And he punishes who? Those who belong to God. Look at it in vss. 9 - 12

9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

Last week we looked at the big picture. Wars and rumors of wars. Famine. Earthquakes. But in these pictures we're going to zoom in on a group called the tribulation saints.

You see there in vs. 12 where it talks about lawlessness is increased.

Let me try to get you into the time frame that I believe is being displayed here. And we'll do that by looking at the second letter that Paul writes to the saints at Thessalonica.

The Thessalonians were concerned about the same end time events we are. Apparently someone had come and taught them that the second coming had already happened, and Paul is going to address that false teaching with them.

1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him (what we call the rapture), 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first,

OK, stop right there, because the word apostasy, I believe is a poor choice for the translators to use. The word means a departure. And most commentators will tell you that it's alluding to a time in the future when the church will apostasize. A great falling away of some sort.

And that isn't helpful to either the Thessalonians or us. The church has been an ongoing apostasy over the centuries, over and over. We're in one now with the modern church in America being 3000 miles wide and an inch deep.

Something happens that allows the man of lawlessness to be revealed. The anti-christ. Something is restraining the revealing of the anti-christ, the man of lawlessness, and the church going apostate isn't a restrainer that gets taken away.

A better translation that makes sense would read; *Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the departure comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts 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. 5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed.*

I believe that what restrains the anti-christ, the man of lawlessness that leads the whole world astray during the tribulation period, is in fact, us.

The church, present in this world, is a restraining force against evil. And the departure, or if you prefer, the rapture, the church departs, and restraint against lawlessness is removed. You've heard the term, all hell breaks loose. It's talking about a world with no church as a restraining influence against evil.

That picture of unrestrained lawlessness during this time frame is a clue to where we're at in this diorama. This view of the events connected with the parousia. The second coming.

9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

Well, who are these folks, if the church has been removed?? Vs. 14. *14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

The Kingdom gospel, the good news that God has sent His Son to die in the place of lost sinners, was resurrected, is in heaven, and will return, will be preached, and people will believe.

But, unlike what we've experienced, there will be extreme cost to be a christian. 9 *"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.*

We've softened up the gospel. Watered it down. Easy, easy believeism. No requirements. Mumble a few words. Sign a registration card. Or just believe the radio preachers words, "if you prayed that prayer, blah blah blah..."

Is this a different gospel being preached in this future time frame? Because it goes something like this:

Jesus came, lived a perfect life, took your sin on His perfect self and suffered all of it's consequences, death, on a cross, and He offers to you, a perfect righteousness. His righteousness. He takes the sin. You take the righteousness, not your own, but given to you, by faith. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and soon, very soon, He will return to this world triumphant over Satan and evil, accompanied with all His saints. You can join that throng. By faith, believing, but, be prepared to pay with your life. You must be willing to give up this world so that you can shine like the sun in the next one. You may die before the day is over, if you believe and accept Him.

Being a follower and believer in Jesus, is a death sentence. Or at least, if you don't experience rapid death, you will be despised and hated and hunted.

Paul warns the Roman church in chapter 8 of Romans;

36 *Just as it is written,*

*"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE*

SLAUGHTERED."

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

Let me introduce you to a scenario here. I'm not dogmatic, just entertaining a possibility;

The church, and what it means to truly be a christian, has become so watered down in America, and indeed other places as well, entertain a "what-if" with me.

What if the rapture comes and we'll use for illustration purposes, what if there's a rock and roll church with Jesus name out front with 8000 members, and after the rapture, 7800 of them meet the following Sunday.

Then, what if the whole world is falling head over heels in love with a man who has messiah like qualities and he brings an impossible peace about and what if he does miracles. And what if his right hand 2nd in command happens to be named Jesus. He claims to be back from heaven. He does astounding miracles.

Now listen again to vss 10 - 12.

10 "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

All of a sudden you've got 7800 worshippers who follow false prophets and join a world wide movement that is swooning over a messiah like person who brings impossible peace to the world and does miracles.

Add to that mix some folks who hear and understand the real gospel and become true believers. Let me tell you, true believers in this toxic mix are going to be hated, persecuted, and most will be killed.

The lines that divide are going to be so stark that even family members of people who are converted to true faith in the real Jesus, will turn on their own family members and turn them into the authorities.

That was just one possible scenario. But whether it has any truth to it or not, the picture being painted by Jesus is that the anti-christ is considered the solution and the true believers are considered the problem. The world is in love with antichrist and his peace and in hate with believers.

13 "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved."

This truth has been in effect since the church was born. Even in our era of no cost, no pressure, people start out, they look to us like they are christians, and they fall away, never to be seen again.

Why would we think this is true in a time of great tribulation and pressure applied by satan and the world, but it doesn't matter if we pray a prayer and come a few weeks, and then we fall away. Christians are finishers. Finishers go to heaven, not starters.

So many things that Jesus said, it seems to me are true on one level for us, and then in this time frame, it's like truth on steroids. Consider a couple of them with me.

He who loves his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake, will find it. That's been true all down through the centuries and it's true today. The more we give up for Jesus, the more He gives back. But in this future time frame, it becomes dogma.

Don't bother following Jesus unless you're ready to be hated and persecuted and killed.

Another one comes to mind. In the Lord's prayer. *Give us this day our daily bread, And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Always the right thing to pray, through all the centuries. We trust God for provision and blessing and He supplies us with all things to enjoy.

But put the same prayer in the context of trying to stay a quarter of a mile ahead of the ones who are going to kill you.

In Revelation 13, I think we'll look at some of it next week, but one of the things it talks about is the mark of the beast. And Christians who do not have the mark, can no longer buy and sell. *Give us this day, our daily bread.*

14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

After the church is removed, how does this take place? The church never accomplished this, although, some would argue that the first century church did in fact carry the gospel to the known world.

In the book of Revelation a couple of things will happen. 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from 12 tribes will in fact spread all over the globe preaching the gospel.

Add to that, the 2 witnesses of Revelation 11 who are seen globally somehow as they witness and anyone who tries to kill them is destroyed by fire from out of their mouths. Pretty effective.

And finally just before the end, we see an angel that broadcasts the gospel around the globe.

So, from this diorama we learn that life for believers during the tribulation period is challenging at best. Most will perish at the hands of religious people who think they are honoring God by slaughtering true believers.

Now we come to a more intricate diorama. Each one as we progress seems to be like opening a telescope section. Like a camera set in space that looks at the big picture first. The overall. Wars. Famine. Trouble. Natural phenomena that causes terror.

Then the camera zooms in. The saints. Hated by all and persecuted. Lawlessness is magnified. Love grows cold. Your own family will turn

on you and report you to the persecutors. Most will perish. Anti-Christ is on the scene and everyone is following him.

The next scene, or diorama if that's working for you, is intricate. We do know the time line, somewhat for this one. We do have some details written 2500 years ago by Daniel the prophet. On our little Disney train we pass through a dark tunnel but now we've come into a new scene. A detailed depiction.

15“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17“Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18“Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19“But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20“But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 22“Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Here is a description of this person, this one strong man, who we refer to as anti-christ.

The abomination of desolations is what Paul speaks of in the 2 thessalonian passage I read earlier.

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the departure comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts 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.

My plan is to re-attack this next week, but for the rest of this morning I want to speak about the phenomenon of leadership.

I'm trying very hard these days to not cross over from religion into

politics. That's a good thing. My job is to feed sheep. To do my best to teach you what this book says.

But sometimes politics and the book intersect. And that is the case here. These verses are very political. It's talking about a one world strong man. A leader so powerful that the entire world, anyone not found written in the Lamb's book of life, will follow him.

America was unique in a way. Right folks, right place, right time, and I believe that God was involved in it. At the right time America would stand with Israel and protect her. That may well have been one of the reasons God raised America up and blessed her.

Freedom and liberty, the unencumbered rights to pursue happiness with as little restraint as possible, is based in a moral people. Our laws were based in the 10 commandments. These are God's laws, do what you want, but with these God given restraints. And we thrived. We flourished, mostly. It wasn't perfect, but in a fallen world, it was the best system ever seen or experienced.

Never-the-less, we are fallen sinners. *The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked* says God through Jeremiah. And if the moral restraint of the Law of God is removed, we descend into anarchy. Rather quickly. Frighteningly quickly.

We abhorred Saddam Hussein. Irak's strong man. So we removed him. But our leaders don't believe in the fact that evil reigns in the human heart, and so you remove a strong man and it's just a vacuum for worse evil.

Since the strongest most powerful nation in the world has cast out God and His moral standards, we're seeing a worldwide descent into anarchy. And the only fix for anarchy, evil people (all of us!) out of control, is a strong man to exert control.

That's the scene, the world stage, that is waiting for and longing for a strong man. A messiah, but not God's messiah. A secular messiah. A strong man who will crush anarchy and restore order.

I was shocked by an article in the Financial Times dated September 16th. Written by Courtney Weaver of Las Vegas. I'll read a few paragraphs. This crosses over into current politics but I believe it illustrates what I'm talking about. The headline is:

[Putin finds a fan base in Trump country

Admiration for Russian strongman is upending post-Cold War norms

From his perch in southern California, Jeff Grimord knows Vladimir Putin is no saint.

A 71-year-old executive recruiter in Newport Beach, Mr Grimord acknowledges the Russian president is often accused of “nasty things”. “Journalists who criticise him are found dead. A little bit of him is still a communist at heart.” Yet despite it all, he cannot help but feel enamoured of the Russian Strongman.

“I think he’s the only leader of a large, major country that stands out these days,” Mr Grimord, a supporter of Donald Trump, explained in a recent interview. “He acts like he’s acting in his country’s interest and makes no bones about it.”

Among the many curveballs of the US election, here is one more to add to the list. After years by being pilloried by western leaders, criticised by human rights groups and targeted by sanctions, Vladimir Putin has a small but sizeable fan club in certain corners of the US, particularly among voters who back Donald Trump. Perhaps more improbably, that fan club appears to be growing.

In August, an Economist-YouGov poll found that only 27 per cent of registered Republicans have a negative view of the Russian president, compared with 66 per cent two years ago. Eighty-five per cent of Republicans say they view Mr Putin to be a strong leader, while just 18 per cent of Republicans say the same of Barack Obama.

Among voters backing Mr Trump, the Russian president’s approval

ratings are even higher, with one-third of Trump supporters saying they view Mr Putin favourably.

The shift in perception comes at a time when Russia-US relations remain at a post-Cold War low, with continued disagreements over Ukraine and Syria. Yet several Trump supporters said those stand-offs had only made them more sympathetic to Mr Putin and his world view — particularly to the extent that the Russian president, both personality and policy-wise, appeared to be a direct foil to Mr Obama.

Most said they had had a positive opinion of Mr Putin even before Mr Trump had begun praising the Russian president's strong leadership, but found the similarities between the two men comforting.

While most western politicians appeared to be constrained by approval ratings — putting their fingers in the air to see where the wind was blowing — Mr Putin and Mr Trump were not afraid of controversial policies, Mr Grimord said, whether it was announcing plans to build a wall on the US-Mexico border or taking action in Syria or Crimea. “[The west] is trying to make [Putin] out to be a real aggressive S.O.B. but I think he is doing what he perceives to be in the best interest of Russia,” he said.

Frank Hawkins, a small-business owner in the Florida Keys, said he admired Mr Putin's actions in Syria and the way he had been able to crack down on Muslim extremism in Russia's restive majority-Muslim republics — something he hoped Mr Trump himself would echo in the US. In Santa Barbara, David McCalmont, a 71-year-old Trump supporter, praised Mr Putin for working the Ukraine conflict to his advantage and asserting Russia's right over “its sphere of influence” in the former Soviet Union.

While some Republican Party neoconservatives might worry Russia wants to drop a bomb on New York City, he — like Mr Trump — believed that the US government should take a more isolationist approach to certain foreign conflicts and focus on its own national interests — something Mr Putin had done with great success.

“Right now there are a lot of people who are very frustrated and very angry that have been cast aside. They’re looking for someone to come around and be forceful . . and have someone at the helm — not like Hitler or Mussolini — but someone who is strong,” Mr McCalmont said.] end article.

Amorality breeds anarchy. Anarchy breeds the desire for a strong man. We are ripe for a strong man to rise up. The world is crying out for this man.

I'm not saying Mr. Trump is this person, I think whoever it is will be far more intelligent, but I'm trying to show you the parallels. The need for a world wide strong man is the stage that will receive the anti-christ with joy.

In those paragraphs I just read, the word strong appeared 6 times. I promised not to be a date setter. But I also promise to point out trends that align with the Biblical narrative. The world is ripe and getting riper every day for a strong man to swoop in and solve unsolvable problems . . . miraculously.

Christians! Keep your lamps filled with oil. We'll get to that in a couple of weeks.