

**Acts 1: 6-11; “The Times and the Seasons”, Sermon # 3 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011, In the Afternoon Worship Service.**

I would like to have us think together, this afternoon, of the times and the seasons which the Father has placed in His own authority. We are told here that the Apostles and the disciples of our Lord gathered to hear His final parting words to them before He ascended. Part of what He told them related to what we want to examine more closely this afternoon. They were told that it was not for them to know the times and the seasons which the Father has placed in His own authority. And the question that we should ask ourselves is this: What does this statement mean? Does it mean for us who live almost 2,000 years since these words were uttered? Is it for us to be able to know something more of the times and seasons than they did then? Or do we put it out of our mind and think that we are meddling with things which are too great for us; things which the Lord does not want us to know?

I think that although we certainly will not know all the details related to the times and the seasons, that the completed Scriptures do give us a better picture of prophetic history than those men had back there at the time of Christ's ascension. It was not for them to know, because they did not need to know. But in the day in which we live, we do need to better understand the general outline of Prophetic History which is given to us in the Scriptures, because Christians do need to know what they are working for, and what they are waiting for. They are working for furtherance of Christ's kingdom, by preaching and sharing the gospel and the Word of God. And they are laboring to promote His kingdom and His glory. They are waiting for God's Son to come from heaven.

What should the expectation of the Christian be in regard to the fulfillment of the great commission and the triumph of the gospel among the nations? We know that in regard to the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Lord, that we will not know the hour or the day when He shall return. In Mark 13: 32 Jesus says, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Realizing that this is true, that there are some things which we can never know completely until they happen, let us still believe that there are some things about the times and the seasons which we can know.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5: 1 Paul says, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.” This was something that they most definitely knew then. But what does that day refer to; is it Christ's return, or the destruction of Jerusalem? Or could it apply to both? Sometimes today we do not know the times or the seasons. We do know, however, that something tremendous has happened in Christ's ascension. Christ has been glorified in His being raised from the dead, and in His ascending to heaven. He

would sit there in his “session”, as theologians call it. He will sit there until the Father makes all of His enemies His footstool, it says in Psalm 110, verse 1.

All power and authority in heaven and earth have been given to Him. All things have been put under His feet. He now sits at the Father’s right hand. He has been crowned with glory and honor. But we are also told in Hebrews Chapter 2, verse 9, that not all things are subjected to Him yet. The Apostles did not exactly understand what was coming next on the prophetic calendar. They asked our Lord, “Is it this time that you are restoring the kingdom to Israel? They still thought of the kingdom in those political terms where Christ would come and free them from the dominion of Rome. It was an earthly kingdom that they were thinking about once again. But let us not be critical of them.

We, too, may have misconceptions about the kingdom and the prophetic future. Prophecy is not a simple subject in the Scriptures. If it were, there would not be so much confusion in the minds of Christians about it today. For instance, it is often said nowadays, that the next event on the prophetic calendar is the Rapture of the Church. That is what is generally anticipated in Christian circles in our day. But I would like to suggest to you from these verses that this may not be the case, and that we should be preparing ourselves for 2 surprising events to take place before the Lord returns, and 1 surprising event when He does return. I would like to use these verses as a launching pad to bring these matters to your attention so that all of us will have realistic expectations of what it means for the prophecies of the advance of Christ’s kingdom to be fulfilled.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Surprising Event, in relation to Prophecy being fulfilled is that the kingdom needs to be restored to Israel.** (verse 6)

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ “And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His authority, but you shall receive power, etc.” And then He tells them the great purpose that He intends for them; the Church being given the responsibility to preach the gospel to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Now, I am sure that stating my first point has probably shocked some of you who are listening to me. I want you to know that I have not, however, fallen to Dispensationalism in my thinking.

Dispensationalism is a system of prophetic interpretation which holds that God has two distinct plans, one for literal physical Israel and one for the Church. In truth God did only have the physical Israel for His people during Old Testament times. And within this physical seed of Abraham there were true believers who were the spiritual Israel of God. They truly knew the Lord, while the rest did not. Dispensationalists have a hard time distinguishing this. They do say that there were proselytes made to Israel during those times, such as Ruth and Rahab and others, and they were brought into the people of God. But they say that when Christ came He offered the kingdom to the Jews in the New Covenant; they rejected God’s plan

and crucified Christ; and as a result, God ceased to deal with them savingly except for a remnant being saved in all the generations before Christ's return.

Then when Christ returns, according the Premillennial Dispensationalist, He will raise all the dead saints and will take those believers who are still alive at the time of Christ's secret coming; He will catch them up to be with Himself in the Rapture, and then God will once again take up His program with Israel during that Tribulation time, and restore the kingdom to the Jews, in the time of the Millennium. Christ will return again after the this 7 year tribulation which they believe is coming, He will destroy the Antichrist and all the political forces aligned with him, and then Christ will reign at Jerusalem for a thousand years with His saints, all those saved during the Church age. At the end of that time, then He will set up His great White Throne and judge all the wicked unbelievers after He raises them from the dead, and will cast them all into the lake of fire.

So what we have, in their system, is two or more comings of Christ literally and bodily, and 2 different resurrections from the dead, separated by a little more than a thousand years. Brethren, this may be a great surprise to you, but the Bible only speaks of one Second Coming of Christ literally and bodily, and one General resurrection of the dead and last judgment. And they all take place on the same day in time; in fact the same hour. Since there is so much confusion over this, let us simply look at a few verses which make it plain that there is only one literal physical bodily resurrection and judgment of all men which will take place at the end of this present Church age.

Turn with me to John Chapter 5, verse 24. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live." "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Now in these verses, Jesus first tells those whom He is speaking to, that the hour was coming and even then was, that those who were spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins would hear the voice of the Son of God and those who would hear spiritually, would live spiritually. They would be raised from their death in trespasses and sins spiritually, being given the gift of regeneration. This is a spiritual resurrection that He is talking of. Then in verses 28 and 29, He speaks of an hour coming, (He does not say that it is now) in which all who are in the graves would hear His voice and come forth—those having done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. This is indeed

two different kinds of resurrection, of the righteous and the wicked, but they will not be separated by a thousand years in time. They will happen in the same hour. All who are in the graves will hear Christ's voice, and they will come forth either to life and immortality, or to eternal shame and condemnation. This is confirmed by Acts 17: 31 where Paul speaks of God's having appointed a Day on which He will judge the world in righteousness. If this is true, that there is only one Day of Judgment, and one general resurrection of all the dead, then this says much about the errors of Premillennial theology. But we will save this for a little later.

What about the restoring of the kingdom to Israel? Well the kingdom being restored to Israel is not dismissed by the Lord Jesus as being a misconception or an error in their thinking. It is the question of "when" that He addresses, and He says that it was not for them to know the times and seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. What does this phrase mean – Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Well, the kingdom is not something in this New Testament time that begins at the Millennium. It began when John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness, and his saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" And this kingdom continues to this day, and it will be forevermore.

But what we need to understand in order that we are not confused, is that certain great prophetic events will occur during this Church age, and that these events form the parameters of the different time periods within it. One Church age with major time periods within it. You see this in the book of the Revelation. You have the time of the seals, and the time of the trumpets, and the time of the vials or the bowls of wrath, and you have the Millennium. You have the time of the 1260 days prophecy, which ends before the Millennium begins. It is not for us to know all of the details of these times or seasons. But that there are both times and seasons; there should be no doubt.

Now even though the Apostles and disciples of that day knew very little of these times and seasons, is no reason that we should not study the Bible to see if we can understand more about where we are in relation to these great seasons of the Church. I believe that restoring the kingdom to Israel does not mean a different program for Israel from the Church. It is rather Israel being brought into the Church, and what that will mean for the kingdom to be restored to them, now being a part of the Church. The early Church began with the Jewish Church and then when the vision was given to Peter in Acts Chapter 10 that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles, the kingdom from that point, even to this very day, became predominately Gentile. The Jews, physical Israel after the flesh, were pictured as being "some of the branches" broken off in Romans Chapter 11 from the one tree of the Church, and the Gentiles were grafted in. (vs. 17)

But in verse 11 it says, "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?" "Certainly not!" "But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles." "Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure

riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” This speaks of a much greater role for saved physical Israel in the New Testament kingdom of God than she has ever had before, when the Conversion of the Jews takes place. For that is what I believe is being spoken of here in Romans 11, and it is also what will lead to the whole Church being revived from a “slain” state at the end of the 1260 days prophecy; that which will happen at the end of those days. In the conversion of the Jews, we will find a catalyst to the fulfillment of the words of Revelation 20, verse 5, “This is the first resurrection”. The first resurrection is not a spiritual resurrection of individual people. It is not a literal resurrection of individual people. It is a corporate resurrection of the Church of Jesus Christ from having been slain in her witness for Christ because of the Antichristian powers. (Revelation 11: 7-11)

**And this, then, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> surprising event which will take place in this Church age before Christ returns; It is that the long awaited Millennium will come.**

Verse 6 of Acts Chapter 1 says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” The gospel must go to the end of the earth Jesus says. And it is His power which makes men who know Him, into witnesses. We know this from Pentecost. We know this from the Reformation. We know this from the great Revivals which have taken place in history.

The Millennium does not come until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, and the kingdom (the Church) is restored to Israel. Turn with me to Luke Chapter 21, verse 24. This is Jesus speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. And He says, “And they (that is the Jews) will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations.” “And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” You see, even the times of the Gentiles have their fulfillment. And when they are fulfilled then the kingdom will be restored to Israel in the sense of their conversion and their being brought into the Church, and their becoming the greatest witnesses in the world to the nations of the world as they once were in the days of the Early Church. Once again, it is hard to discern the exact timing, and the way that this will unfold. God loves to keep a secret, but it shall indeed come to pass if I am understanding these things rightly.

Ezekiel Chapter 37 is a good description of the beginning of the “First Resurrection” of Revelation 20. “The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones.” “Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very dry.” “And He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ “So I answered, ‘O Lord God, You know.’ “Again He said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’ “Thus says the Lord God

to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live.’ ‘I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live.’ ‘Then you shall know that I am the Lord.’ And look at verse 9 – ‘And He said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘thus say the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.’”

“So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an extremely great army.” “Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.” “They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’” “Therefore prophecy and say to them, ‘Thus say the Lord God: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves and bring you into the land of Israel.’” “Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.” “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.” “Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it.” That will be the start of the Millennium, that great time period when the gospel shall come with power to all the nations and Satan shall indeed be bound and not be able to stop it. The nations shall no longer be deceived by false systems of religion, world wide, but the gospel shall conquer.

**And then 3rdly – There will be 1 surprising event at the end of the age, when Christ returns.** (Verses 9-11)

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold two men stood by the in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?’” “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Jesus will come back again. He will come back at the end of the Millennium, and after Satan has been released from his prison and manages to go back to deceiving the nations for “a little season”.

If the Millennium is a literal thousand years this is why we will not be able to know the hour or the day of Christ’s coming. The surprise is found in Revelation Chapter 1, verse 7 – “Behold, He is coming with the clouds; and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him.” “Even so, Amen.” If every eye can see Him, even those who pierced Him, it means that the great general resurrection of the dead will just have taken place. And the Rapture, too, will have taken place just before that, at that same hour. This therefore, helps us understand the phrase, “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended,” which is mentioned in Revelation 20, verse 5. The “rest of the dead” are actually all the dead from all generations.\*

The “first resurrection” of Revelation 20 is a mystical spiritual resurrection of the souls of those who were persecuted and martyred under the Antichristian power

of Rome, both Pagan and Papal, whose spirit was resurrected in the Millennial time period, and seen in the great number of witnesses for the truth, particularly in the conversion of the Jews. It is the resurrection of the cause for which they suffered and died, and that cause and kingdom prevailing among the nations because the Spirit will shine greater light upon the truth of the Bible and give greater power to the witness of the men of those generations. This is what we should expect in accordance with the truth which we have seen today. The times and the seasons the Father has put in his own authority, but he gives us a glimpse of them in the Scriptures, and they cause us to have great hope.

\*Footnote:

Patrick Fairbairn has a good treatment on verse 5 of Revelation 20 – “the rest of the dead”, and “the first resurrection”. He says on P. 473 of his fine book, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* – “Why designate the event referred to so explicitly and repeatedly as not only a resurrection, but the first resurrection, and distinguish between the dead then raised and the rest of the dead, who are not to be raised till the close of the millennial era, if the description is not to be understood of definite individuals, but symbolically of the representatives of Christ’s cause and kingdom among men?” “Simply, we answer, to mark the greatness of the moral resuscitation that is to take place, the mighty and permanent impression it is to make upon the world, and the near approach that is to be effected by it toward the final issues of the kingdom.”

“In these respects it will be immeasurably superior to everything that has been known or experienced within the sphere of the earthly life.” “In describing it the prophet must borrow his imagery from the higher life to come: it is the first resurrection, because it seemed to his illuminated eye to partake more of the immortal vigor and bloom of the resurrection-state, than of the sickliness and languor which hitherto characterized the church on earth.” Fairbairn takes the view that “the rest of the dead” not coming to life until the thousand years were finished, refers to the spirit of the party of wicked men who have opposed the gospel; coming to life again.

He says on P. 475 concerning the Millennium – “Nothing any longer should appear of the lukewarm, who had hung mid-way between flesh and spirit, Christ and the world, and in times of temptation had every been ready to fall away; far less of those who had openly espoused the cause of ungodliness, and soiled their garments in the pollutions of the world.” “At the Millennial era there shall be no resurrection of such mongrel characters—none at least, till the period commenced by the era shall be drawing to its close.” “Then the other dead shall have their representation also; and the diversities that have appeared in the past shall be found embodied anew in the lives and actions of professing Christians.” “Not so, however, during the Millennium itself.” This statement of his is very well said.

In the footnote at the bottom of that page he says – “It is only by understanding thus “the rest of the dead” who lived not till the close of the thousand years, of classes of characters, that the uniformity of the symbolical description is preserved.” And to interpret it of the remnant mentioned in Chapter 19, verse 21, or of the dead generally as to their personal resurrection, is to bring in a realistic element out of place in the midst of symbolical delineation.” I agree with Fairbairn’s first part of this last statement but not the last. I link the phrase, “the rest of the dead” with verse 12 of Revelation 20 where it says, “I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened.” This is literally where the rest of the dead come to live again. I think this linking fits the context better and also the distinction that is being made.

In this passage, the symbolical description of “judgment being committed to the saints” to reign; pictured by the souls of the martyred dead sitting upon spiritual thrones in verses 4-6, is giving way now, in verses 7-12, to the inclusion of the literal physical when Christ returns. Even though not specifically mentioned here in the Revelation 20 passage, yet in considering the other passages which bear upon it, Christ’s return must take place in connection with verses 9 and 10. I believe that “the fire coming down out of heaven” which is mentioned there; fire that will come down upon those people who have been deceived by Satan and devour them; I believe that it is literal fire. It is the same kind of wording as what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah.

And in that case, too, the Lord came down to see what was happening there, and then it says, “the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens.” God the Father will do the same thing here, I believe He will say, “Now is the appointed time.” And the Lord Jesus will rain down the fire from heaven, and then that will be followed up by His personal visible return in the clouds of glory. Then will come the fulfillment of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1: 7 when, “The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I have no problem with seeing the phrase, “the rest of the dead did not live again” referring to the time when Satan is released from his prison. And since he has been freed, his evil intentions against Christ and His Church result in renewed attempts to deceive the nations, when for so long a time he had been unable to. This is what specifically follows in verses 7-10 of the passage. But verses 7-10 do not specifically speak of Satan’s cause being resurrected or coming to life; it mentions Satan being “released” from his prison. His ability to deceive by means of false doctrine, and his ability to persecute and wage war against the saints had been imprisoned. But it had never been dead.

Therefore it does not “come to life” in any sense but that he is now free to do what he had been kept from doing for the thousand years. But at this point, of

Christ's literal bodily return and appearing, I do not think that there is any inconsistency in my interpretation. When John "saw the dead, small and great standing before God," in verse 12, "and the books opened", it shows us that indeed "the rest of the dead" at that point, now live. It is an event which will bring the souls and bodies of all people back together for the final judgment, both righteous and unrighteous. Both groups "live" again. The righteous will live to be blessed and rewarded. The wicked will live to be judged and condemned to eternal punishment. And so, in my mind, there is no reason that this view of Fairbairn's, about being spiritually consistent in the interpretation of the passage, cannot be brought together with this interpretation that I have given that "the rest of the dead" refers to all the dead.

Because the distinction must also be made, and kept, between the spiritual resurrection of the cause of Christ's witnesses in the Millennium, and the general resurrection of all the dead when Christ returns. The first is "the first resurrection"; a resurrection leading to a thousand year spiritual reign of the saints upon the earth. The second is the literal physical resurrection, which, for the saints leads to everlasting life. For the wicked, their coming to life, will only lead to their being judged and condemned, and their being sent away to everlasting punishment. And thus the passage has consistency, both literal spiritual, and literal physical in their respective resurrections.