Sermon Series: Things to Come
Sermon Title: The Return of Christ

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34 -- "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Opening: Many of us go to great lengths to avoid learning the endings of films we haven't watched or books we haven't read. We get upset with friends who slip up and spill the surprise ending. The movie reviewer **Roger Ebert** once warned his fellow critics that they NEVER have a right to play the spoiler. But a study from two researchers at the **University of California, San Diego** suggests that SPOILERS DON'T SPOIL STORIES. Instead, contrary to popular wisdom, ***they might even enhance our enjoyment of it***. The study ran three experiments based on 12 short stories. Each version of the story was read by at least 30 people. Surprisingly, the researchers found that the study participants preferred the "**spoiled**" versions of **suspenseful stories**. For example, in one case, participants were told *BEFORE* reading the story that a condemned man's daring escape is all just a fantasy before he dies on the gallows. That spoiler alert helped them accept the ending with less angst and a greater appreciation for the film. One of the researchers had an interesting theory about why people liked getting a spoiler alert. He said, "***It could be that once you know how [the story] turns out … you're more comfortable processing the information and you can focus on a deeper understanding of the story***." I suspect there's some truth to this. I'm one of those guys who likes to know the end before we actually get there because ***it almost always lessens the degree of suspense in the middle when it sometimes seems there is no hope***. It's not a movie or book, but when Penn State was playing the University of Miami in the Orange Bowl in January of 1985 for the Division 1 football championship, my brother became the spoiler for me. He called me unaware that I had taped the game because I wasn't able to watch it live. The first words out of his mouth were, "***Can you believe it? That was the most exciting game I've ever seen. Penn State picked off Vinnie Testaverde seven times and won the game 14-10.***" Later, when

I actually watched the game and it looked like my Nittany Lions were going to lose, I didn't sweat the outcome one bit because I already knew who won the game.

This morning, in **our fifth message** in the series, ***Things to Come***, we're going to look at **what happens according to the Bible at the end of the seven-year tribulation period** we looked at last week. I suspect that many of us are grateful that the Bible plays the spoiler and tells us what's going to take place right at the moment when everything is at its absolute worst on Earth. THAT'S WHEN THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST HAPPENS. ***His return from heaven will be personal, visible and glorious***.[1] This is a very important moment for the believers who live through the tribulation. That's why the Bible mentions it so often. Did you know that NEXT TO OUR FAITH, THERE IS NO SUBJECT MENTIONED MORE THAN THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST? IN FACT, FOR EVERY TIME, THE FIRST COMING IS MENTIONED THE SECOND COMING IS MENTIONED EIGHT TIMES IN SCRIPTURE. **Join me now as we take a look first at three events that precede Christ's return and then what's going to happen at His second coming**.

JESUS' RETURN WILL BE PRECEDED BY THREE EVENTS. Sometime after the rapture and before Jesus comes again these events will take place – the first two in heaven and the last one on earth.

- **THE REWARDING OF BELIEVERS** – This is often referred to as the BEMA SEAT JUDGMENT. It's named for a raised seat upon which a judge sat when he rendered judgment. It also was used in connection with the platform on which a judge sat while judging the Olympic games. Listen to what Scripture says about it in **2 Corinthians 5:10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil**. Note that those believers who have been raptured (**Luke 14:14 -- You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just**") will have our works judged by the Lord and then He will reward us based on the extent to which our lives and ministry follow the Word of God. These rewards will carry with them positive consequences in Christ's millennial kingdom and possibly His eternal kingdom. Note that though there may be a loss of a reward, it will not result in a loss of salvation!
- **THE WEDDING SUPPER OF THE LAMB** – **REVELATION 19:7-9** – (sequentially, this happens before Jesus returns) **Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added,**

"These are the true words of God." **<u>This is not a marriage made in heaven, but a marriage taking place in heaven</u>**. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 11:2** that we have been **betrothed to one husband … as a pure virgin to Christ**. How exciting will this be? The word ***<u>Hallelujah</u>*** is not found anywhere in the New Testament except here in **Revelation 19**. IT MEANS "**PRAISE THE LORD**." IT'S AS IF THE ANGELS WERE SOMEWHAT RESTRAINED UNTIL THIS POINT BUT THEN ARE GIVEN PERMISSION TO LET LOOSE WITH PRAISE AS CHRIST COMES TO RECEIVE HIS BRIDE.

- **THE SALVATION OF THOSE WHO COME TO FAITH DURING THE TRIBULATION** – Remember that at the rapture, all believers on the earth are removed and given their glorified bodies. But God will not leave Himself without witnesses during the tribulation. We're told in **Revelation 7** that there will be 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from each tribe, who will lead many to faith in Christ (**Revelation 7: 4, 9-10 -- And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel … After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!**"). There will also be those who come to faith through the miracles and testimony of the two prophets (witnesses) sent from God to call the Jews to repentance for the latter 3½ years of the tribulation (**See Revelation 11; Zechariah 4:11-14**). This means that many people will BE SAVED at that time and enter the millennial kingdom (IN NON-GLORIFIED BODIES) under the rule of Christ.

<u>These THREE things happen prior to our Lord's return. Here's what happens when Jesus comes back</u>.

JESUS' RETURN WILL RECLAIM THE WORLD FOR GOD BY DECISIVELY AND COMPLETELY DEFEATING HIS ENEMIES (**Revelation 19:11-21 -- Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, <u>King</u>**

of kings and Lord of lords. 17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." 19 And I saw the beast (the antichrist) **and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast** (the antichrist) **was captured, and with it the false prophet** (**Revelation 16:13ff** – *likely a religious leader that many will follow*) **who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh**). CHRIST WILL DESTROY THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS AND BRING RIGHTEOUSNESS ON THE EARTH. As the nations gather in Palestine to destroy Israel, they will be alerted to the second coming of Christ since it will be a visible return (**See Matthew 24:27**). Christ will rescue the Jewish people from terrible destruction and fight against the nations. Their end will be total destruction. The antichrist and the false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire. Satan will be bound and thrown into the Abyss, the place of confinement for demons where he will remain for 1,000 years (**See Revelation 20:1-2**).

Listen to these words from **R. Geoffrey Brown** about this great and decisive victory: Some will tell you that triumph will come by the development of human beings--the gradual evolution of their potentialities. We should just give it time, wait and see. Everything's coming up roses. World War I dealt that theory the cutting blow. World War II broke its spirit. Vietnam laid it in its grave. The takeovers of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan shoveled the dirt of interment on it. Will human progress stop people and nations from sinning? Will human progress and achievement ever wipe away all tears from our eyes or heal our broken hearts? To ask these questions is to answer them. No, the final victory will not come through some natural progress of human development, nor through the religious forces that are operative in the world right now. The victory will come not by an improvement of the present order but through its complete overthrow and supersession. **The high point of human history will be the sudden appearance on the field of battle of the captain of our salvation. And he will come in glory, and it will be comparable to what John beheld: Look, I see a great white horse. And there is a rider on that horse whose name is Faithful and True, and there are many crowns upon his head**. (Review: JESUS' RETURN WILL RECLAIM THE WORLD FOR GOD BY DECISIVELY AND COMPLETELY DEFEATING HIS ENEMIES.)

JESUS' RETURN WILL BRING SALVATION TO MANY IN ISRAEL. With the defeat of God's enemies, many Jews will come to believe in Jesus. This is what Paul is referring to in **Romans 11:25-26 -- Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved**. It is also what the text I read at the beginning of this message is talking about. **Jeremiah 31:31, 33- 34 -- "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day … 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." With the removal of God's enemies from the land, believing Israel will experience the fulfillment of God's land promise found in Jeremiah 16:14-15 -- "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' 15 but 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers.** (Review: JESUS' RETURN WILL RECLAIM THE WORLD FOR GOD BY DECISIVELY AND COMPLETELY DEFEATING HIS ENEMIES; BRING SALVATION TO MANY IN ISRAEL.)

JESUS' RETURN WILL RESULT IN THE CONDEMNATION OF ANY UNBELIEVING GENTILES AND JEWS. In fact, no unbelievers will survive the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. The first group to be judged will be the Gentiles (non-Jews) who survived the tribulation. This is often called the "**sheep**" and the "**goats**" judgment. In **Matthew 25:31-33** we're told, "**When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left**." The internal spiritual condition of the Gentiles will be revealed externally by the way in which they treated Israel during the great tribulation. They will give valid proof of their true righteousness in Christ by providing food and drink for Jews, welcoming them in as strangers, and giving clothing to them, and caring for them when they were sick as well as visiting them in prison. Jesus will say to them, "**Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.**'" This will demonstrate their true love and

affection for Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Those who ignored suffering Jews will be sent away into everlasting punishment. **AS FOR THE JEWS WHO SURVIVE THE TRIBULATION, the parable of the ten virgins speaks to their situation (Matthew 25:1-11).** If you remember, Jesus mentioned that five were foolish and did not take enough oil for their lamps while the others did. When the bridegroom returned, they were off trying to find more supplies and missed out on the marriage feast. Those Jews who are not prepared for the return of Christ will not enter the millennial kingdom. (Review: JESUS' RETURN WILL RECLAIM THE WORLD FOR GOD BY DECISIVELY AND COMPLETELY DEFEATING HIS ENEMIES; BRING SALVATION TO MANY IN ISRAEL; WILL RESULT IN THE CONDEMNATION OF UNBELIEVING GENTILES AND JEWS.)

JESUS' RETURN WILL BRING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION OF OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS AND THOSE WHO HAVE DIED DURING THE TRIBULATION. It is at the second coming that these believers are given their resurrected bodies and are rewarded according to their works. **Revelation 20:4-5** describes this event taking place for those who died during the tribulation -- **I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.**) **Daniel 12:1-2** mentions Old Testament saints -- **And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life**. (Review: JESUS' RETURN WILL RECLAIM THE WORLD FOR GOD BY DECISIVELY AND COMPLETELY DEFEATING HIS ENEMIES; BRING SALVATION TO MANY IN ISRAEL; WILL RESULT IN THE CONDEMNATION OF UNBELIEVING GENTILES AND JEWS; WILL BRING ABOUT THE RESURRECTION OF OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS AND THOSE WHO DIED IN THE TRIBULATION.)

JESUS' RETURN MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM. Christ will establish His rule over the entire world (everyone at the beginning will be a believer) and reign over everyone as King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the topic for next week's sermon.

As I wrap this up, let me share five differences between the rapture and the second coming.

- At the rapture, believers meet the Lord in the air and return with Him to heaven. At the second coming, Christ returns to the earth at the Mount of Olives.
- At the rapture, there is no judgment on anyone. At the second coming, Christ's judgment will fall on unbelievers.
- The rapture occurs BEFORE God's wrath is poured out on the world. The second coming occurs AFTER God's wrath has been poured out on the world.
- The rapture can occur at any moment. The second coming will be preceded by numerous signs and events.
- At the rapture all BELIEVERS will be removed leaving only UNBELIEVERS on the earth. At the second coming with its accompanying judgments, all UNBELIEVERS will be removed and only BELIEVERS will remain.

Conclusion: The end is near, and it's coming to a theater near you, or right into your own living room. Did you know that end-of-the-world movies are more popular today than ever with no sign of slowing down. From **Night of the Living Dead** (made within fifteen minutes of my home in Western Pennsylvania) to H. G. Wells's, **The War of the Worlds**, the number of apocalyptic movies seems to double every ten years. **Why is it that they continue to be so popular?** Perhaps, deep down, HUMAN BEINGS know that our history has an appointed conclusion, that the end of our story has already been written. It may be no accident that the recent increase in apocalypse-themed films has coincided with the rise of increasingly chaotic geopolitics. Many people wonder if what's taking place right now in the Middle East is a sign that the end is near. Of course, I don't know the answer, but I do know this: **When the end of the world as we know it comes and Christ returns, it will only spell doom for those who oppose His Lordship over their lives. As for all those in heaven and on earth who have placed their faith and trust in Him, they will say on that day**, "**Maranatha … the Lord has come**."