Sermon Series: Things to Come
Sermon Title: The Time of Tribulation

Text: Isaiah 13:6-12 -- Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! 7 Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. 8 They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. 9 Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. 10 For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. 11 I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. 12 I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.

Opening: Every marriage has its share of trials and troubles. But imagine <u>going off on your honeymoon and getting victimized by SIX natural disasters!</u> That's what happened to newlyweds **Stefan and Erika Svanstrom** when they left **Stockholm, Sweden**, for their **four-month honeymoon in December 2010. FIRST**, they were stranded in Munich, Germany, when Europe was hit by one of its worst snowstorms. **THEN** the couple went to Australia. In the city of Cairns, they were struck by one of the most ferocious cyclones in Australia's history. **THEY** headed south to Brisbane but discovered that the city had experienced massive flooding. **So,** they traveled across the country to Perth. There, they narrowly escaped raging bushfires. **NEXT**, the couple flew to Christchurch, New Zealand. Unfortunately, they arrived just after the city was devastated by a magnitude 6.3 earthquake. **LATER ON**, the couple went to Japan. But a few days after their arrival, Tokyo was rocked by Japan's largest earthquake on record. ***<u>The family returned to Stockholm on March 29, 2011, after a much calmer visit to their last destination, China</u>***. Looking back on the trip, **Mrs. Svanstrom** said: "**To say we were unlucky with the weather doesn't really cover it! It's so absurd that now we can only laugh**." AS BAD AS THAT HONEYMOON WAS (SIX NATURAL DISASTERS IN SIX WEEKS), IT PALES IN COMPARISON TO WHAT PEOPLE ARE GOING TO EXPERIENCE DURING THE SEVEN YEARS OF TRIBULATION PROPHESIED IN SCRIPTURE.

If you're visiting, we've been in a series called ***Things to Come*** now for three weeks. Together, we have been looking at what the Bible teaches about the end times. So far, we have considered **<u>the signs that will lead up to the rapture of the church and, then, into what is called the tribulation period</u>**. Two weeks ago, we talked about **<u>what happens when a person dies before they are resurrected</u>**. Where do

they go and what is it like? Finally, last week, we studied the Scripture to see **what it says about the rapture which is the time when believers who have died as well as those alive at the time will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**. TODAY, WE'RE GOING TO STUDY WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT **THE TIME OF TRIBULATION THAT WILL PRECEDE CHRIST'S RETURN TO THE EARTH**. BY THE WAY, THE WORD "TRIBULATION" MEANS **AFFLICTION** AND REFERS TO THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD THAT BOTH **UNBELIEVING JEWS AND GENTILES** WILL EXPERIENCE FOLLOWING THE RAPTURE. Now let's ask and answer six questions that will help you have a better understanding of what God is doing during this time.

WHY WILL THERE BE A TRIBULATION? Let me give you three reasons: (1) First and foremost, God's plan is to use this time to bring the nation of Israel and many Gentiles to faith in Jesus Christ. For this to happen, God will employ all sorts of miracles. He will also allow some intense persecution to come upon Israel. That's what is being described in the passage I read to you from **Isaiah 13:6-9**. It is God's judgment on Israel during the tribulation otherwise known as **the Day of the Lord.** During this time, destruction from the Almighty will come upon them so that their hearts will melt with fear. It will be a terrible time when God's wrath will be poured out on His people, the Jews, to purge sinners from their midst. God will destroy the arrogant and the ruthless so that the unrighteous will die and those that remain will be able to say at Jesus' second coming**, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord (Matthew 23:39); (2) the second purpose is to judge wicked people and nations who have rebelled against God.** While He is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness **(Exodus 34:6),** those who refuse to turn from their sin and trust in Christ will suffer an unprecedented time of trouble and judgment on the earth **(Revelation 6-18); (3) thirdly, it will prove the power of God, which if you remember, Pharaoh questioned in Exodus 5:2 -- Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord". Scripture reveals that the antichrist (**a human leader who will come to power during the last 3 ½ years of the tribulation**) will do likewise. Listen to what it says about Him in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 -- He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. The preceding verse reminds us, however, that he is doomed to destruction. (Review: Why will there be a tribulation?)**

HOW LONG WILL THE TRIBULATION LAST? Though there could very well be a short period of time between the rapture and the actual beginning of the tribulation to allow for some developments to take place, once the tribulation begins, most believe it will last seven years. This is what we learn from **Daniel 9:24-27**. **Before**

we look at these verses, it would help to know their context. This chapter of the Bible records Daniels' prayer regarding the Jew's exile to Babylon, brought about by their idolatry and disobedience. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted 70 years of captivity, but as that time drew to a close, there didn't seem to be any hope for them to return to their beloved homeland. In response to his prayer, God sent the angel Gabriel with a message about Israel's future. Here's what he said, "**Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. 25 Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. 26 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. 27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator**." Without going into too much depth, I just want you to notice three different units of time that come to a total of seventy weeks: (**1**) First, **there is the mention of seven weeks with each day of the week representing one year**. This marks the time of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem; (**2**) Then, **the angel talks about sixty-two weeks accounting for more than four centuries**. This accounts for the time following the rebuilding of Jerusalem until the Messiah comes; AFTER THIS SECOND DIVISION OF TIME AND BEFORE THE THIRD TAKES PLACE, TWO THINGS WILL HAPPEN -- the Messiah will be killed (**the anointed one shall be cut off**) and Jerusalem will be again destroyed (**the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary**). (**3**) As for the third week (seven-year period of time), **it will occur when the antichrist makes a covenant with Israel for three and a half years only to break it later**. At this point, he will desolation on the Jews and the world. THIS HAS NOT HAPPENED YET, BUT IT'S ON THE BASIS OF THIS PROPHECY THAT WE BELIEVE THE TRIBULATION WILL LAST SEVEN YEARS.

WHERE WILL CHRISTIANS BE DURING THE TRIBULATION? There are three answers to this question. Here at River Ridge Church, our doctrinal position is that we believe in a rapture of the church before Christ's 1,000 reign on the earth. But we do not align ourselves with any of these positions, in particular. We leave that up to you and your own study of the Word.

- **Post-tribulation rapture position –** This view says that the church (made up of believers in Christ) will go through the tribulation in its entirety. Those who are not martyred for their faith will be raptured just prior to the Lord's second coming.
- **Mid-tribulation rapture position –** Just like it sounds, those who hold to this view believe that the church will be raptured prior to the time of the great tribulation. One of the major differences between this and the other two is that the tribulation will last just 3 ½ years. Any suffering that Christians will endure before this event is just the normal stuff that we can expect because we are not of this world (**2 Timothy 3:12 -- Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**).
- **Pre-tribulation rapture position –** This is my personal view and I know it is for a number of you as well. It is based on the teaching from Scripture that the church (those who are in Christ) will not experience the wrath of God. Instead, the Holy Spirit who indwells believers and restrains lawlessness will be taken out of the world and we will go with Him (**2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 -- And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way**). This means that we will not be around to suffer through the tribulation. In addition, we read verses like these in the New Testament -- **Romans 8:1** -- **"There is therefore now no condemnation (judgment) for those that are in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:9** says, **"For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ". Again, in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 Paul says, "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."** Yet this is exactly what the tribulation brings to the Jews and all the nations of the earth -- **Revelation 6:15-17 -- Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Listen to this**: In the book of Revelation, the word "church" is mentioned 19 times in the first three chapters. However, the description of the tribulation is found in chapters six through the end of nineteen and no place in those fourteen chapters is the word "church" found! This is God's grace and mercy poured out on those who follow Christ as Savior and Lord. Grace is a beautiful thing. When I was a youth pastor at my former church, I booked a retreat for over a hundred people,

secured coach buses for the occasion and booked a speaker from Alabama. The week before the trip, I called the camp to confirm everything was good and that is when I was told that I had booked the trip for the following weekend. As soon as I heard these words, I thought to myself, "**There's no escaping the consequences on this one**." I had royally screwed up. So, I picked up the phone and called Laurie to tell her what I'd done. Then I went downstairs and told the senior pastor the same thing and potentially how much money it could cost the church – about $20,000 dollars. After that I told him I'd have my resignation on his desk by the end of the day. Doug told me to make some calls and see if I could fix things. By the grace and mercy of our Lord, the bus company, the speaker, my volunteers and almost every student was able to switch to the following weekend. This story, as dramatic as it was for me, doesn't compare with the grace and mercy that God shows to Christians when He raptures us prior to the tribulation. **(Review: Why will there be a tribulation? How long will it last? Where will Christians be during the tribulation?)**

WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN THAT IT HAS BEGUN? –The tribulation starts with a peace treaty between the antichrist and Israel for seven years – Daniel 9:27 -- And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. This covenant will allow them to rebuild the temple as many of the Jews will return to their ancient worship system (See Matthew 24:15). The antichrist is going to be a man possessed by Satan. Could he be alive today? We don't know because we don't know when the rapture will occur. **We do know about him according to Daniel 7:8 where he is referred to as the little horn having the eyes of a man and a mouth that speaks boastfully. He'll seem to be a man of peace and that's exactly what the world will need after the rapture when so many people are suddenly caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.** He's going to guarantee Israel's security but break his promise in the second half of the tribulation. **The antichrist's rise to power and his covenant with Israel will signal the beginning of the tribulation.**

WHAT ARE THE JUDGMENTS OF THE TRIBULATION? What's going to happen during this seven-year period? From Revelation 6 through Revelation 19, there are three series of seven judgments that will fall upon the living.

- **Revelation 6:1-8:1 -- The first of these is SEVEN SEALS that represent <u>THE ADVENT OF THE ANTICHRIST, OPEN WARFARE, FAMINE, DEATH, MARTYDOM AND PHYSICAL DISTURBANCES</u> that kill one-quarter of the earth's population. These all occur during the first three and a half years of the tribulation.**

- **Revelation 8:1-11:18 -- The seventh seal (chapter eight) is the SEVEN TRUMPETS. This will mark the last three and a half years of the tribulation when the antichrist will break his treaty with Israel. He will rule the world economically, politically, and religiously. The mark of the beast is 666 (Revelation 14), which is the numerical value of the antichrist's name. Nothing today is the mark of the beast because we're not in the tribulation period yet. No one will take the mark of the beast accidentally, but willfully. So, what are the trumpet judgments from Revelation 8 and 9? They include HAIL AND FIRE MIXED WITH BLOOD; SOMETHING LIKE A HUGE MOUNTAIN THAT IS SET ABLAZE IS THROWN INTO THE SEA WREAKING HAVOC ON EVERYTHING IN IT AND ON IT; A GREAT BLAZING LIKE A TORCH CALLED WORMWOOD FALLS FROM THE SKY AND POISONS A THIRD OF THE FRESHWATER SUPPLY; A THIRD OF THE SUN, MOON AND STARS ARE TURNED DARK; A TERRIFYING PLAGUE OF DEMONIC LOCUSTS THAT ATTACK PEOPLE WITH POWER LIKE THAT OF SCORPIONS; THE RELEASE OF FOUR FALLEN ANGELS THAT WILL KILL A THIRD OF ALL THE PEOPLE**
- **Revelation 15: The seventh trumpet is the SEVEN BOWLS. It seems that all of these are judgments that God unleashes on the earth at the very end. They include UGLY, FESTERING SORES THAT BREAK OUT ON EVERYONE WHO TOOK THE MARK OF THE BEAST; TURNING THE WATER IN THE OCEANS TO BLOOD KILLING EVERYTHING IN THEM; ALL THE FRESHWATER TURNS TO BLOOD; SEARING BY THE INTENSE HEAT OF THE SUN; THE KINGDOM OF THE ANTICHRIST IS PLUNGED INTO DARKNESS; THE EUPHRATES RIVER DRIES UP PREPARING THE WAY FOR KINGS FROM THE EAST TO MEET THEIR FINAL DESTRUCTION; FLASHES OF LIGHTNING AND AN EARTHQUAKE MORE SEVERE THAN ANYTHING THE WORLD HAS EVERY SEEN.**

HOW WILL THE TRIBULATION END? Two events will signal the end of the seven years of suffering:

- **The coming of Christ – Revelation 19:11-16 -- I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God**

Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

- **The campaign of Armageddon. This is a future climactic battle between God and the forces of evil. Revelation 19:19-21 -- Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.**

Conclusion: The message of the entire Bible is this … Jesus is coming; Jesus has come; and Jesus is coming again. I was reading this week that many Jerusalem residents believe not only that the Messiah will return, but that his arrival is imminent--so imminent they have taken legal precautions to ensure they can return to Jerusalem immediately upon his return. In apartment contracts around the city, there are clauses stipulating what will happen to the apartment if or when the Jewish Messiah comes. Using something called a "**Messiah Clause**," the contracts stipulate that, in the event of the coming of the *Moshiach*, or Jewish redeemer, the lease "**may be immediately terminated at the will of the landlord**." The owners, generally religious Jews living abroad, are concerned that he will arrive, build a third temple, and turn Israel into paradise--and they will be stuck waiting for their apartment tenants' contracts to run out before they can move back. It is prophesied in the Jewish scriptures that there will be no more war, murder, or theft, the Jerusalem Temple will be rebuilt, and all the Jews will return to the land of Israel upon his arrival. There is no count of how many leases in Jerusalem contain such a clause. But although not standard, the Messiah clause is requested enough that every Jerusalem property manager and real estate lawyer contacted by reporters had heard of it, and all except one had dealt with it firsthand. **Perhaps that's not the best way to prepare for the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than protect their interests, it makes sense that they should be more concerned with the condition of our souls**.