

## **“Out-A-Time”**

### **Revelation 19:11-22:7**

*Series: The Story Chapter 31: The End of Time*

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The future ain't what it used to be.

On Wednesday, October 21<sup>st</sup> the future arrived. On that day Doc Brown, Marty McFly and his girlfriend Jennifer rocketed into our day in the time-traveling DeLorean. Now the makers of the first Back to the Future movie knew what life was like in 1955. They had to guess about life in 2015. Some of their predictions were amazingly close. Here are a few they got right:

1. Watching multiple TV channels on flat screen TVs
2. Video games without hands
3. Identification using your thumbprint
4. Drones – although we don't see them walking dogs
5. TV glasses
6. Video conferencing
7. A baseball team in Miami

There were, however, a lot of predictions they got wrong:

1. Hoverboards – There is a hoverboard but it can't leave the lab
2. Self-lacing sneakers – Do we really need technology to solve this problem?
3. Food Hydrators – Sort of missed the food network revolution
4. Phone booths – Also missed the cell phone revolution
5. Faxes everywhere – And the Email, Texting, Facebook, Twitter revolution
6. Japan running the world – Actually it's China
7. Flying cars – Sorry George Jetson
8. Double neckties – How about no neckties?
9. The Cubs in the World Series – Ah so close on this one. Wait until next millennium.

It is perilous to predict the future. Yet people keep trying. You may remember four years ago there were 5,500 billboards predicting the end of the world. Harold Camping, a civil engineer and president of Family Christian Radio, used a complex mathematical calculation to pinpoint the Second Coming. Camping teaches the number 5 symbolizes atonement, 10 represents completeness and 17 stands for heaven. He then multiplies these  $(5 \times 10 \times 17) \times (5 \times 10 \times 17)$  and comes up with the number 722,500. These, Mr. Camping explains, are the number of days since Jesus' crucifixion which he fixes as April 1, 33 AD. What was the date he predicted for the end of the world? October 21<sup>st</sup>. Wow, there must be something special about that date. Back then someone suggested I should not show up on Sunday morning so you'd think you were left behind. I was afraid the opposite might happen and I'd be all alone.

After thirty chapters we arrive at the end of The Story. Congratulations. You made it! We started in January with the creation of the world. Today we reach the end. Yet this isn't just the end of a book. It's the end of time, space and the universe. This is the only part of The Story still to come. Many questions about Christianity arise from these two events: how and when did the

world begin and how and when will it end? We shouldn't be surprised. The beginning and end of the universe are two horizons. We live a distance from the horizon. You can see a point on the horizon from a distance but you don't know what it's like until you get there. So, like Back to the Future, all our ideas about Jesus' Second Coming will be partial and incomplete. We'll get some things right and others wrong.

Yet Scripture tells us specific truths we can trust. The Second Coming of Christ is not a minor belief. It is mentioned in the Gospels and the writings of the Apostles. The Revelation (and by the way it's Revelation not RevelationS) is the longest and most famous description of Jesus' return. The Revelation or Apocalypse was given to John while he was a prisoner on Patmos, an island off the coast of modern Turkey. The opening of the book contains letters from the Risen Jesus to seven churches on the mainland: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. All these believers face persuasion, pressure, or persecution to give up their faith. Jesus' direction to them is, "Be bold, don't fold." Here's what He says to the Laodiceans

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Revelation 3:14-16, 19-20)

No warm and fuzzy Jesus here. This is serious. God does not want us to be lukewarm. There are forces and powers which are working to draw us away from Jesus. We need to stand firm and not compromise. He is standing at the door and knocking. Do you hear His voice? Will you open the door and let Him in? In chapter 4 John sees an open door in heaven. The Risen Jesus says,

"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." (Revelation 4:1)  
For the rest of the book John sees one vision after another of how the world will end. What does Revelation teach us about the end of The Story?

First, **God Plans to Restore What Was Lost.** In essence He wants to take us 'Back to the Future.' As you read this last chapter of the Story you may notice a certain symmetry with the first chapter. The first line of the Story reads, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2). Near the end of the last book it says "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea" (Revelation 21:1). In the second chapter of Genesis it says,

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden (Genesis 2:8-10)

And in the twenty-second chapter of Revelation we read:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. (Revelation 22:1-3)

This is the fulfillment of God's grand plan: to restore what was lost in the beginning. All the chapters of the Story – the call of Abraham, the Exodus led by Moses, the kingdom of David, the return from Exile, the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the spreading of the Good News – are all part of God's passionate mission to get us back. The curse of sin is gone. The Upper and Lower Story are reunited. God and humanity are one once again. This is beautifully described in Revelation 21:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:3-5)

I read that passage at nearly every funeral and memorial service. That is the hope God holds out to us, the hope which we hold most dear. We long for the day when every tear He will wipe away and death itself will pass away. When will that be?

The second truth we learn is **God is Outside of Time**. The license plate on Doc Brown's DeLorean was "OUTATIME." The main obstacle we have in understanding Jesus' Second Coming is that God lives outside of time. Even in the first century, doubters wondered why it was taking so long for Jesus to return. The Apostle Peter explained God is not a slave to Time as we are.

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:3-4;8-9)

God is the Creator of Time. He is above it and outside it. He lives in Eternity. Eternity is not infinite endless time. It is no Time. There is no past or future for God. All is present. The Creation, the Cross, and the Second Coming are all now for God.

The analogy I often use is a parade. If you were on the street for last Thursday's Thanksgiving Day's Parade you probably saw some Mummies, the SpongeBob Balloon and the Pennsbury marching band pass by you in sequence. You only experienced what is right in front of you. If, however, you are high up in the Comcast Building you can see the entire parade. It's all present to you. God lives outside of time in the Upper Story while we live in time in the Lower Story. We can only experience one event at a time. All events are present to God. If you grasp this concept it will clear up some confusion. Here are a few examples.

What about people of faith who died before Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross? We cannot go back in time. Yet the salvation Jesus won on the Cross is eternal; it is not limited by time. He can save those who looked forward to Him in faith in the past just as He saves us who look back to Him in faith from the future.

Why is it taking so long for Jesus to return? He says in the second-to-last verse of Revelation (and the whole Bible) "Yes, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:20). For God it is soon. From point of view of eternity no time separates Jesus' first coming and His second. If a thousand years is like a day to God it's only been a long weekend. This is the same answer to those who ask, "Why did it take so much time for God to send Jesus after Adam and Eve sinned?" Answer: For God, it took no time at all.

What happens when we die? Do we go straight to heaven or do we wait for the Resurrection? This is complicated because the Bible seems to say both. Take for example Paul. He frequently describes those who die in the Lord as being "asleep."

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

These verses seem to teach that when someone dies they wait in sleep until the Day of Resurrection when they will rise and meet the Lord with believers who are alive.

Yet in another passage Paul suggests believers who die are instantly with the Lord. While he was in jail Paul wrote he was not afraid to die. In fact, he longed for it.

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Philippians 1:23-24)

Some theologians theorize there is a place called Paradise where believers who die wait with the Lord until the final Resurrection when God will bring the new heaven and new earth. This may

be what Jesus means when He says to the thief on the Cross “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Another analogy I use to explain this is a child sitting in the back seat of a car. While on the journey she falls asleep. When they arrive home, her father lovingly, carefully carries her to her bed. The next morning she wakes up in her home completely unaware of the passage of time or how she got there. From her perspective the change was instantaneous. Above all, during that whole time, she was in her parents’ protective, loving care. Rest assured, your loved ones who died in the Lord are safely resting in God’s care.

What will be the sequence of events which lead to the end? There are a bewildering number of timelines for the end times. When it comes to end times teachings there is Pretribulationism, Midtribulationism, Posttribulationism, Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, Post-tribulational Premillennialism, Pre-tribulation Dispensational Premillennialism and Panmillennialism where it all just pans out in the end. Why are there so many different timelines? Because nobody really knows. Many of these teachers take passages from all over the Bible and force them into their formulas. Whenever you see so many different opinions it usually means they don’t have the real answer. That should not surprise us since Jesus said He didn’t know.

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. (Matthew 24:36-37)

If Jesus’ trusted His Father to pick the right day, so should we. So please do not force God’s Word, especially the book of Revelation, into some artificial timeline. Don’t fall for the end time predictions of others. What are we supposed to do?

Until the end comes, our mission is to **Walk Through the Door**. The Risen Jesus says to the Church in Philadelphia

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (Revelation 3:7-8)

Our job is not to sit and calculate His return. Jesus wants us to walk through the door to shine His Light and share His Story. When our nation was only a few years old, there was a Colonel Davenport who was the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. One day in 1789, the sky of Hartford darkened ominously, and some of the representatives, glancing out the windows, feared the end was at hand. Quelling a clamor for immediate adjournment, Davenport rose and said, "The Day of Judgement is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought." Rather than fearing what is to come, let’s be faithful till Christ returns. Instead of fearing the dark, let’s shine His Light as we watch and wait.

You know Doc Brown had to harness 1.21 jiggawatts of power from a lightning bolt to send Marty back to the future. You have far more power on your side: the power of the Holy Spirit. Shine His Light in this world of increasing darkness and terror by helping Urban Promise, Code Blue, Recovery Ministry, Dinner Ministry, Griefshare, Pathways to Hope, Manor Care Worship, Clothed with Compassion, Special Way, Alpha or by serving in one of our other missions or ministries. Now that you know the Story, share it with those who don't. Make it a point to invite someone to worship during Advent or Christmas or to your Growth Group. Share about the difference Jesus has made in your life. May God's kingdom come and His will be done in you. Walk through the door Jesus opens before you and start living Heaven here and now. Then invite everyone you know to join you.

Someone has said, "Won't it be boring to be in heaven?" Not a chance. I'm looking forward to the day when there won't be a need for hospitals or cemeteries. I can't wait for the day when weapons systems will be obsolete. I long for the time when terror will evaporate and you can't be afraid even if you tried. I pray for the day when you won't notice the color of a person's skin. I seek the day when there won't be class divisions, denominations or nations. I praise God that one day no one will have to stand in a soup kitchen line, an unemployment line or a welfare line. And I am thankful to God that one day there will be the Greatest Thanksgiving Feast you ever saw: the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. The darkness of this world will seem like just a bad nightmare that passes away with the dawn. We will see all those who, by faith, have gone ahead of us. What a homecoming that will be. What a wonderful family reunion. We shall never have to say goodbye again. God will begin a new story in which each chapter is better than the last.

If that is boring...may I be bored for all eternity.