

God Alone Knows the Future

Revelation 10

There is an old gospel song with the words “I don’t worry o’er the future, for I know what Jesus said, and today I’ll walk beside him, for he knows what is ahead. Many things about tomorrow, I don’t seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand.”¹

The doctrine that God alone knows the future is a comfort to Christians. There is a lot that we in our finiteness and humanity do not understand. But there is a God in heaven who *does* understand. His knowledge is perfect and exhaustive—even including future things. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes into this world in his incarnation and knows with perfect knowledge what is going to take place in the future. During the final week of his earthly life, as he was about to institute the Lord’s Supper, he gave instructions to a couple of his disciples: “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, “Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.” So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover” (Luke 22:10–13).

Utterly amazing! Jesus foretells the future with perfect understanding. This was not some vaguely-worded promise of success. Our Lord predicted the future with perfect accuracy. He nailed it! The disciples “went and found it just as He had said to them.” This perfect knowledge of the future is a remarkable testimony to his divinity. Only God can know the future with certainty. Jesus is God!

Think of another of his predictions—one uttered again and again on different occasions: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again” (Matt. 20:18–19). Jesus spoke with such clarity that his enemies—but strangely not his disciples—understood exactly what he had said, and when the time came, they persuaded Pilate to order a guard at the tomb. Again, a remarkable testimony to Jesus’ divinity! Here is one who knows the future with perfect certainty. Dear brothers and sisters, your life and destiny are perfectly secure with him! Do you want to go to heaven? Then put your trust in him. Heed his words. Do what he tells you to do. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15). Dear saint of God, you can rest upon his word. If you commit your life to Christ, believing on his

¹ Ira F. Stanphill (1950), “I Don’t Know about Tomorrow,” https://hymnary.org/text/i_dont_know_about_tomorrow

word, putting your eternal destiny in his care, he will save you. You will never perish but have eternal life. His reputation is on the line, and he will not fail. “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day” (John 6:39). That is his promise, and he cannot fail.

I have three points this afternoon: (1) An open book; (2) A prophetic declaration; (3) A commandment to take and eat the book. First,

1. An open book

When, in the opening verses of our chapter, the resurrected, glorified, exalted Christ sets his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land—a declaration of his sovereignty over all things—a figure of speech known as *hendiadys* (two words connected by a conjunction that are used to express a single notion)—he cries out with the voice of a lion (a lion’s roar, as it were, a frightening cry that strikes the fear of God into his enemies and followers alike, then the seven thunders utter their voices. The voice of the ascended, exalted Son of God brings to mind the voice of God over Sinai, with its thunderings, lightnings, smoke and thunder. It is the same voice. The voice that thundered God’s holy law over Mount Sinai now thunders not only the destruction of the Holy City that had rejected Christ, but gives God’s plan for the far-off future.

In the words of Chilton, “Of course, everyone wants to know: What did the seven thunders *say*? An astounding amount of scholarly ink has been wasted on the solution of this problem. But, in this life at least, we can never know the answer.”²

Verse 4 declares: “Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.’”

Here, then, is an open book, a prophecy revealing Christ as the omnipotent One with perfect knowledge of the future, revealing that knowledge to his servant John, but then instructing him to seal up the things that the seven thunders uttered, and not to write them. The message was intended for John’s ears only. It was not intended for the church at large. This was all part of God’s perfect plan.

God is perfectly wise. He always makes the right decision. If he thought we needed to know this information he would have revealed it. But in this case he deemed that we do *not* need to know this information. His people do not need to have perfect, exhaustive knowledge of the future. He has told us what he wanted us to know, and he seals up the rest. He wants us to trust him implicitly, following him as the Good Shepherd, leading his people to heaven. A flock of sheep doesn’t need to have specific information concerning where the shepherd is going to lead them on any particular day. They don’t set up a committee to go to the shepherd

² David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 262

early in the morning and demand, “Where are you going to take us today? Are you sure this is the best plan for us?” It is the Shepherd’s job to take care of the sheep; it is the sheep’s job to follow. “My Shepherd will supply my need; Jehovah is his name.” That’s all we need to know. Christian, you and I are in the hands of the Good Shepherd. He has promised to give us eternal life, and that no enemy can pluck us out of his hand. *That is all we need to know.* If we demand to know more, then we are not really trusting him.

Here before us is an open book, the Bible. It is a perfect book. Every word of God is pure. God has revealed everything he wants his people to know. The church must preach all of the Bible—the whole counsel of God—and nothing that’s *not* in the Bible. Christ has called his undershepherds to exposit (explain) and apply the teachings of his word. What his sheep need is the ordinary means of grace: the Word, the sacraments and prayer. We do not need what false shepherds style as inside information—hidden secrets that are in the Word of God that the church never noticed before. R. J. Rushdoony wrote, “Man is more often prompted by curiosity than by obedience.”³ Such explains the popularity of the charismatic churches with their “new revelations of the Spirit.” People get bored with the old, old story of Jesus and his love. They want more—what some religious peddler is peddling. The faithful church is not like a salesman hawking his product in an infomercial, trying to keep his audience tuned in: “Wait, there’s more.” Christ is the Good Shepherd, and our job is to follow him, studying the open book.

Second, notice

2. A prophetic declaration

Consider verses 5–7, “The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.”

Here is the prophetic declaration: “there should be delay no longer.” The destruction of Jerusalem, what the Lord Jesus calls “the great tribulation,” was imminent. In the final chapter of the book of Revelation John will be commanded: “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand [ὁ καιρὸς . . . ἐγγύς ἐστιν]. The time is near. Jesus had given fair warning in Matthew 24: the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world (οἰκουμένη, inhabited earth, the Mediterranean region) and then the end would come. The book of Acts documents how the gospel, carried by men such as Paul and Silas, indeed had been preached in the whole Mediterranean world. Though many Jews had been

³ Quoted in Chilton, 263

obedient to the faith, the Jews as a whole rejected the Messiah. In the word of Paul to the Thessalonians, “the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess. 2:16). The “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:20) was about to happen. It would not be pretty. The Roman armies would come to Jerusalem’s gates. There would be widespread death and destruction. The temple itself would be destroyed. The sacrificial system would come to a definitive end. The Aaronic priesthood would be replaced by the Lord Jesus, the high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The Jews would lose their covenantal status. The fulness of the Gentiles would begin to come in. This was all part of God’s perfect plan.

Here, then, is the prophetic declaration: “there should be delay no longer.”

Believers now live in the era after the destruction of Jerusalem. The old covenant with its ceremonial laws has passed away. We now come through the new and living way—through Christ. We in the new covenant era have greater knowledge, greater understanding, greater privileges. We must never turn back to Judaism but remain faithful to Christ. He must increase, but we must decrease. We must preach the gospel in such a way that the emphasis is not upon the mouthpiece but upon the Son. Christ must be all in all! The preacher is not indispensable; *Christ* is indispensable! If anyone is preaching another Christ, he is a false prophet and to be rejected.

Thirdly, here is

3. A commandment to take and eat the book

Consider the last part of our text: “Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, ‘Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.’ So I went to the angel and said to him, ‘Give me the little book.’ And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.’ Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.’”

Here was a message that would be sweet in the apostle’s mouth but would make his stomach bitter. What is this referring to? Chilton explains, “John was called to prophesy about the victory of the Church and of the kingdom of God. A necessary corollary to the triumph of the righteous is the destruction of the wicked. . . . The same judgments that deliver us also destroy God’s enemies. . . . And while St. John could rejoice in the victory of the Church over her enemies, it would still be a wrenching experience to see the once-holy city leveled to a rubble, the Temple torn down and burned to ashes, and hundreds of thousands of his relatives and countrymen starved and tortured, murdered, or sold into slavery.”⁴

⁴ Chilton, 268–69

As in Amos 5:18–20, where it says, “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?”

The apostle John would grieve for Israel, the covenant people. They are about to be disinherited and executed, never to be restored as the covenant nation.

There is a lesson for us here. We should never take our covenant status for granted. God’s promises are true and glorious, but they are for those who persevere in faith. Jesus taught, “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Mark 13:13).

That is our job: to endure to the end, trusting in Christ regardless of the circumstances.

We cannot save ourselves. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8–10).

But if God has saved us by his grace, then he wants us to abide in him, to persevere in the way of faith.

Obedience is the way of blessing. Amen.