

**Introduction:** Perhaps you have read about or seen the YouTube video about, **The Last Lecture** featuring Randy Pausch. "Last Lecture" series have become a common event on college campuses . They provide a special opportunity for a college prof to share what matters most to him or her. Put another way, they answer the question, "What wisdom would you impart to the world if you knew it was your last chance?" Of course, in most cases, these profs are healthy and not really delivering their last lecture.

Randy Pausch accepted Carnegie Mellon University's invitation to give a "last lecture," but a few weeks later he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which put a much different twist and focus on what he would say. Knowing that it very well could be his "last lecture," he wrote, ". . . by speaking, I knew I could put myself in a bottle that would one day wash up on the beach for my children . . ."

Randy Pausch wanted to leave a message for his three children: a message of hope, of vision, of life.

I don't know about Randy Pausch's spiritual life but I sense that what stirs deep within people about his "last lecture" is the message of hope it gives. People are desperate for something or someone to give them hope, so they know that their life matters, that if they live a certain way, it will count for something.

But isn't there a more important, more basic issue involved here? I believe there is. So what if I live a certain way throughout my life? What difference does it make anyway?

If life is only about the "here and now," then who or what really determines "what counts" or "what matters"?

Pastor Dave will be addressing these issues in his upcoming message series from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. The writer of that book, part of the Hebrew Wisdom Literature, explores what really matters and doesn't matter in life.

For now, by faith, we believe there is a God, that He has spoken, and that He has given us a record of what He wants us to know about Him and His purpose for us. And an important part of His purpose for us is that He wants us to spend an eternity with Him in Heaven.

In other words, life does not just involve the "here and now," it also involves eternity. And, the quality of your experience in eternity is related to what you do here and now . . . your life now will influence how you enjoy the eternity God is preparing for you.

What this means is that your life not only can have meaning and purpose now, but it impacts eternity as well! Such knowledge provides hope, a hope that how I live my life now is worth it.

Open your Bibles to the last book in the Bible – Revelation. Once you find Revelation, turn to the last chapter.

I want to be quick to clarify, that the life that impacts, in a positive way, your enjoyment of eternity is not something arbitrary or capricious. It is guided by God through His Word, as well as the teaching ministry and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit along with your fellowship with Jesus.

Yet this life God intends for us to live is not a monotone, strait jacket, one-size-fits-all kind of life. It is as diverse and variegated as this congregation. God allows for your individuality while conforming you to the image of His Son in terms of Jesus' character & attitudes.

While there are principles and truth upon which we should be unified, God will take your talents & abilities, your spiritual gift or gifts, your own unique way of doing things, and He will work through each of those in your life along with your weaknesses and your messes and failures. He can take and bring glory to Himself through you and your life.

But is it worth it? That question was certainly in the minds of believers who first read the Apostle John's prophetic letter. Let me set the background just a bit for you . . .

The church was still less than a hundred years old. Believers in Israel and then throughout the Roman Empire had been persecuted by the Jews for their blasphemy, by the Romans for either treason or just for wicked pleasure, and now in the last decade of the century, the Roman emperor Domitian, persecuted Jews and Christians as atheists – because they did not recognize him as divine.

Living life as a Christian in the Roman Empire, was not considered good for your health! At the least, Christians were marginalized and at the worst, they were put to death for their faith. The apostle John, himself had been exiled to an island in the Aegean Sea, and that is where he received from the Lord this "revelation."

The book of Revelation contains several important themes, and one of those is the Lord's encouragement to His church, to believers, to hang tough.

And after a number of messages given to John, to the seven churches, and to believers in general to encourage them to endure the adversities of the present, Jesus gives His last message to the church.

Let's read it together – Revelation 22: 6-21

Imagine yourself as a believer in the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. You have heard your parents tell of the apostles who came to visit their village in Galatia. In fact, your parents knew Paul personally plus they knew some of the Gentiles that were at the Temple on the Day of Pentecost as well as having talked with a few who were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

You heard and understood the promises of the Jewish Torah regarding their Messiah but that Messiah was also coming to

set all captives free – that included Gentiles as well. You understood that God loved all people yet because of His holy, righteous character, sin must be judged. Yet God chose to place the penalty of sin – everyone's sin on Jesus, who according to both testimony and His resurrection – was God in the flesh.

Jesus' death on the cross was for your sin. His resurrection was the promise of life that overcame death. You believed this was true and you accepted the truth that Jesus was Savior because He was the Lord Who alone could offer such a gift.

You knew, from the apostles' teaching that you were now a Christian, a believer. You knew that you had eternal life that assured you of spending eternity in Heaven as well as now being able to live life as God intended.

But like the first disciples, there were times of doubt and worry, some confusion on how Jesus was going to fulfill the rest of the Messianic promises. It really wasn't so much IF he would fulfill them or necessarily even HOW he would do it, it was more a matter of WHEN?

But your parents and other believers whom you respected would remind you, "Jesus told us we are not to be concerned about the 'when' but with simply being faithful to His teachings and being witnesses to the villages in which we live and to the world." And then they would add, "Jesus will keep His promise to come again."

From the Jewish scriptures, you knew that Messiah's ministry not only meant providing salvation, it meant that one day, according to the covenants God made with Israel, that Messiah would rule as the King of kings as David's heir and His rule would ensure that peace, righteousness, justice, and purity would prevail.

King Jesus will deal with injustice and unrighteousness decisively. King Jesus will restore peace & holiness.

King Jesus will honor all who have been faithful and persevered during their temporal life. Their faithfulness in the midst of persecution and suffering will be rewarded. Just and righteous punishment will be the consequence for each one who "loves and practices lying."

How you have longed for that day. But until that day, in the joyful anticipation of Jesus fulfilling His promise, you choose to live as if He will come TODAY!

So as God brings to a close the inspired declaration of His purpose and plan for humanity, what better message could there be than this for those who long for Jesus to come again? For almost two millennia, that promise and that hope has sustained the church. Why? Because it is hope in SOMEONE, not just a principle or ideal – it is hope in the person of Jesus Christ the Lord.

- Jesus – the One Who fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament prophets regarding the saving work of Messiah;
- Jesus – the One Who promised those who followed Him, would become fishers of men;
- Jesus – the One Who promised He would be raised from the dead on the third day;
- Jesus – the One Who promised the disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit;
- Jesus – the One Who promised Saul would be a powerful witness in His name to the Gentiles;

And because it is this same Jesus Who has promised to return, we HOPE! And such hope enables us to live in such a way as to impact our world for Jesus' sake.

But, it has been almost 2,000 years. And it is not a stretch to say that we might be a bit skeptical or at least entertain doubts about the certainty of His promise. We look at the world and can become overwhelmed with the injustice, inhumanity, unrighteousness, suffering and hardship we see – and perhaps even experience. (Cf. 2 Peter 3:4)

This Last Message of Jesus is just for you then. He wants to give you hope. He wants you to know He is coming again.

In fact, as we read our Lord's Last Message – you can sense the urgency in His assurance. Three times, Jesus says, "I am coming quickly."

Now some of you are saying to yourself, "The Lord sure has a weird sense of what 'quick' is." So let's deal with that first.

God's timing is not our timing. Many of you, through life experiences, have figured that out already, but we need to say it. God is not bound by your DayTimer, your PDA or your Outlook calendar.

Nor is God forgetful or confused regarding His promise. He's not sitting up in Heaven, browsing through a celestial Hallmark calendar trying to come up with the best possible day and time for Jesus to come again.

But, "hey", you counter – it's been almost 2,000 years. How is that "quick"?

For whatever reason, when we read "quickly," we see it as a period of time between when the promise is made and the actual event, as in your promise to your kids – "I promise to treat you to a DQ next week." (And then the countdown begins.) But that is not what is in view here.

What is in view is this: When the Lord comes again, it will happen quickly and it can happen at any time. It will be a very sudden event. No time to prepare, no time to make changes, no time to adjust life to fit the event.

The City of San Antonio just hosted the NCAA Final Four of men's basketball. They knew the date of the event several years ago and put plans into place to be prepared for the event.

But what would have happened had the NCAA called the Mayor's office on April 3 and said, "Phil, we will be in town tomorrow for the Final Four competition. Just thought we'd let you know." One possible response from the Mayor might be,

"Well this is very sudden!"

Even more suddenly and quickly will be the return of Jesus!

What if you did know that seven days from now at 11:42 AM, CDST, Jesus would come again? What difference would that make in your life? What would you change? What would you stop doing? What would you start doing?

But Jesus doesn't give us a calendar date or a time, He simply says that when He comes, that event will happen suddenly and at any moment.

On one hand that should be a great encouragement. On the other, it might just concern you some. What is really important is that we understand how our Lord wants us to be living while we anticipate – hope for – His return.

There are admonitions about living for Jesus in anticipation of His return scattered throughout the New Testament. Today, we will just focus on our Lord's Last Message.

John records for us at least four responsibilities, four guidelines, as to how to live life in anticipation of the King's return.

### **Attentiveness**

After Jesus' first affirmation, "Behold, I am coming quickly," He adds, "Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

The certain, sudden coming of Jesus demands our attentiveness to spiritual things so our lives will count for Him today.

Do not hear me say that you should not plan for the future. James tells us in his letter to believers,

*Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead,*

*you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."*

James 4:14-15

You place your trust in your heavenly Father Who is both sovereign & good and prepare for the future while recognizing that the next breath you take may be your last. And part of that preparation is attentiveness to His Word.

This verse specifically refers to attentiveness to the truths found in Revelation. Interestingly, Revelation is not full of many direct commands to individuals. It is aimed at churches (Chapters 2-3) and nations (Chapters 6-19) in detailing events before and during what is called the "great tribulation."

Nevertheless we are to give our attention to what it says, reflecting on its spirit of expectation and on its description of God's Holy character.

One reason God gives us prophecy is to help us better grasp His awesome, holy character, His transcendent glory and the beauty of what He has prepared for those who are His. Being confronted with His holy character helps us to better appreciate His grace and mercy.

When you read Revelation, there is a sense of urgency, while describing the seriousness of rejecting Christ as Savior on the one hand and the blessedness of serving Him on the other.

So the first responsibility is Attentiveness. The second is:

### **Worship**

As John wrote this message, he was so overcome, he was moved to worship. But he was worshipping at the feet of the angel who had brought the message to John, and that was wrong.

Now it should be of some comfort that the apostles from time to time worshiped the wrong thing or person. That can happen when emotions overwhelm understanding. Yet the angel's

correction of John serves to remind us, that we need to be on guard and be sure to only worship God and God alone.

Our motive might be pure, but the object of our worship is only, ever to be God. It can be tempting to worship other things, people, movements, organizations. But there is only one truly worthy of our worship: God.

Worship is a key theme of prophecy because it is an activity in which we will be engaged throughout eternity! So our worship of God here and now provides us an opportunity to practice for what we will do then!

When we live life with the perspective Jesus may come at any moment, we will join with John in worshiping God alone.

The third responsibility recorded by John:

### **Proclamation**

In verse 10, John is specifically admonished to not seal up the words of this book. That is, Christ's at-any-moment, sudden return is not a message to be hidden. And if it is not to be hidden then it figures that this message is one that should be proclaimed.

Verse 11 may appear at first glance as fatalistic, or at the least somewhat confusing. What is Jesus saying to John?

My understanding is this: The emphasis in this passage is on the moment Christ comes back. At that moment, a person's eternal destiny is fixed. There is no second chance.

It comes with the suddenness and rigidity of a sudden death playoff game in the National Football League. When two teams play to a tie at the end of four quarters of a playoff game, they are given an additional time to play until one team scores. But when that team scores – that's it. The game is over. The team that scored, wins. The other team loses. No second chances, no do-overs, no reconsideration. It is settled. But up until that score is made, until points go on the scoreboard, there is a

chance.

So it is with the second coming of Jesus Christ – when Jesus comes back, that's it. No second chances, no do-overs. But until then – and this is the emphasis in the passage – until then proclaim, live out, the message of Jesus Christ. Attentiveness, Worship, Proclamation – Three responsibilities which are all incorporated in the final one:

### **Service**

The second time Jesus affirms His return, and adds, "And My reward is with Me."

Jesus makes clear that there is a reward for the believer who serves Him. This affirmation was a great source of encouragement to those believers who first would hear them. Their experience of persecution and suffering in the name of Jesus would have been in vain were it not for the hope Jesus offered.

That is why Jesus underscores His authority to make such a claim by reminding His readers that, "I am the Alpha & the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." He is the Lord, from eternity-past to eternity-future. He will reward those who faithfully serve Him here on earth.

Jesus is coming! When? At any moment – Suddenly! Maybe today, maybe tomorrow, but He will return.

In response to those promises, we can live life giving full attention to God's Word, worshiping Him with fervent hearts, proclaiming the Gospel message of Christ with passion – all of this to serve our Savior as if there might not be a tomorrow.

He Who testifies to these things say, "Yes, I am coming quickly."

AMEN. Come, Lord Jesus.