



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 15.7 – The Doctrine of the Last Things (Eschatology)

The End of The World

What God created in the beginning was **“very good”** (Genesis 1:31). But when sin entered the world through the transgression of Adam and Eve, the entire created world was affected in a negative way. God said to Adam: **“Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return”** (Genesis 3:17-19). Everything that is not right with the created world today is a result of man’s sin.

The apostle Paul explained this to the Christians in Rome in these words: **“The earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now”** (Romans 8:19-22).

Notice that the creation did not go bad because it wanted to go bad. God subjected it to futility when man fell into sin. Paul calls the present situation of the created world **“the bondage of corruption”**. He says that at present **“the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs”**. The world that we live in now is not the very good world that God created in the beginning.

But notice that God has something good in mind for His creation. The created world is eagerly waiting for something, just as a woman in labor is eagerly waiting for the birth of her child. The created world has hope for the future. The created world is looking for deliverance from its present futility and corruption. This deliverance will include a share or a participation in **“the glorious liberty of the children of God”** in some way.

This deliverance will take place when this world, as we know it now, will come to an end. The psalmist describes the end of the world like this: **“Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end”** (Psalm 102:25-27; quoted also in Hebrews 1:10-12). The eternal God who does not change will change His creation. The created world as we know it now will perish; it will die, so to speak, of old age.

The prophet Isaiah pictures the end of the world in these words: **“All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; all their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from a vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree”** (Isaiah 34:4). **“The heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished”** (Isaiah 51:6).

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that **“heaven and earth”** will **“pass away”** (Matthew 5:18). He said the same thing to His disciples during Holy Week: **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away”** (Matthew 24:35). The apostle Paul said: **“The form of this world is passing away”** (1 Corinthians 7:31). The apostle John stated: **“The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever”** (1 John 2:17).

Jesus spoke about the end of the world and the changes that will come then as **“regeneration”** (Matthew 19:28). The apostle Peter called it **“the times of restoration of all things”** (Acts 3:21). The apostle Paul called it a deliverance from the bondage of corruption **“into the glorious liberty of the children of God”** (Romans 8:21).

Since the world has continued for so many centuries without coming to an end, there are many who do not think that there will ever be an end to this world. Or they believe that man himself will bring an end to this world through a nuclear explosion or through pollution of the atmosphere or that there will collision with an asteroid, or some such event. But the apostle Peter already foretold that there would be such skeptics in future times. **“Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire unto the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”** (2 Peter 3:3-7). As God destroyed the world once by water, so He will destroy our present world by fire.

This is the way it will happen: **“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”** (2 Peter 3:10-12).

The world as we know it will be destroyed. What will take its place? The prophet Isaiah tells us what God has in mind. **“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy”** (Isaiah 65:17-18; see also Isaiah 66:22).

The apostles Peter and John encourage us to look forward to this new world that will emerge when our present world is no more. Peter says: **“We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”** (2 Peter 3:13) No more bondage, no more corruption, no more futility!

The apostle John has revealed to us what the Lord God showed to him. **“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”** (Revelation 21:1-4).

Questions

1. Why is our present world not the same as when God created it?
2. What pictures did Isaiah use to describe the end of the world?
3. What will remain the same even when the world comes to an end?
4. What is the opinion of many people concerning the end of the world?
5. Why do they hold this opinion?
6. In what way will God bring this world to an end?
7. What will take the place of our present world?
8. In what way will this be different from the world we live in now?