

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG118 – The Great Tribulation – Part 1

Hi, and welcome to another adventure in *Growing In God*, a podcast that is dedicated to bringing us as believers into our maturity in Christ. I want to work with this podcast, because in the last podcast I made a statement about my own personal belief, which is that there is not a pre-Tribulation rapture where the Church and believers are taken out of the earth prior to the advent of the last days, including what is termed the Great Tribulation. The point of that podcast was not to get into that doctrinal issue. It was about Ephesians the sixth chapter, in verse 12, where we deal with the spirits that we are facing in the time of the end; and we have weapons of warfare that are powerful in God to the tearing down of strongholds, so we are not without God's authority and protection during whatever days we go through in our walk with Him. But in this podcast, I want to back up a little bit, because I do not want to leave people wondering about some of the details. And again, this is about my personal beliefs. I know there are many people that do not hold to these same beliefs, and I want to address that aspect of it first, because I do not think that is a problem.

I do not believe that the issue of pre-Tribulation or post-Tribulation rapture, amillennialism, these types of end-time doctrines, are really something that is to be divisive among us as believers. The reason is because I do not feel that they affect the bulwark – the foundations of our faith are not surrounding doctrines of the end time. We are all believing in Christ's coming to the earth, in His life here and His suffering on the cross, His resurrection; we are all believing that He does return again. These are things that are really foundational to our faith and our salvation. They are things that are important to our eternal life, that bring us into eternal life. And if you have differences about pre-Tribulation rapture or post-Tribulation rapture, I do not feel that it impacts your eternity. Therefore, I do not believe that among us as believers, this should be a point of division. I am not saying it should not be a point of Bible study or discussion, but that is different than turning it into an argument and turning it into some type of a jugular issue between believers that it just should not be. The last thing we need today as believers are more points to be divided on. I think we are divided on enough things, and what we are believing for now is the oneness in the body of Christ, and that God bring us into a oneness of faith. That should be something that we really do subscribe to. But these other things will work themselves out.

One of the things I believe is that when the Lord returns, we will know how He got here. And so, whatever our ideas are leading up to the point of His return – we may understand some things, we may not understand many things – but whatever those concepts are, at some point they will be resolved. They will be resolved very much with His return. As He said, the sign of My coming is My coming. That is what we will know very clearly – that the Lord is appearing in the sky, that He is returning to take up His throne and to rule the nations – and that is what we all look forward to in our faith as believers. So, I want to clarify this, because I did not want to leave it as something that was hanging out there that people would have trouble with. Don't have trouble with it. As I was taught by my mentor, if you do not get it right now, just put it on a shelf. Let the Lord at some point bring it down and explain it to us, and teach us more perfectly what we need to know and understand. But don't let it be a point of stumbling or a point of division, or whatever. Let's just keep walking with the Lord, and knowing that as we walk

with Him, we will continue to grow and to mature in the things of God. And He will continue to give us understanding, the Holy Spirit will bring things to light for us, and He will teach us all things. That is part of our maturity process in the Lord and during our walk with God, and we are thankful for that. I am thankful that we are always able to grow and mature.

So then, I want to go back and touch base with a little bit of what it means to me, personally, and my thinking about the fact that there is not a pre-Tribulation rapture. Obviously, the result is that in my faith, I, if I make it to the point of the Tribulation, and the Church, when it gets to the point of the Tribulation, will continue to remain in the earth as a witness and testimony and a spreader of the Gospel through the time of the Tribulation. So I want to go back and pick up some of the Scriptures and touch on these points, and say, "This is what it means to me." Now, to those who do not believe that way, this timeframe holds a completely different way of thinking. It has to, because if you are planning to be removed from the earth and not experience this tribulation, and not experience the persecutions that take place during this time, then obviously what you are looking forward to today in your walk with the Lord, and what you see coming during your lifetime, is very different than what I am expecting, or waiting for, or seeing down the road as I look forward into the things of God. That is why with this podcast, I just want to touch a little bit on this topic. This may turn into two podcasts, I don't know; it depends on how deeply I get into some of these Scriptures. But whatever, let's have fun with it. Let's seek the Lord in it. Let's look to the Word of God and believe for Him to teach us and guide us in it.

If we are looking toward these things, obviously a great place to start is the gospel of Matthew, in chapter 24. I will begin with verses 1-2. "Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.'" And we know that in fact did happen, that they tore the Temple down, stone by stone. One of the reasons, as I understand it, is because there was so much gold in the Temple that when it was routed and burned, the gold melted and went between the stones, and they pried every stone to get the gold. So we know that the Word of Christ was fulfilled: "Not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." Verse 3, "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'" So there are three questions here that are asked. The first is, "Tell us, when will these things happen?", speaking about the tearing down of the Temple. "And what will be the sign of Your coming?" Now they start to add questions that He was not necessarily addressing when He was talking to them, but they are very interested: "When is the sign that You are returning? and of the end of the age?" And notice how, in their minds, this was one question; it was not two questions. There is not the sign of His coming, and then a space that precedes the end of the age. They are one in the same thing. When He comes, the end of the age is upon us, and we go through the process of all things being concluded. That is, again, one of the differences in the faith that there is not a pre-Tribulation rapture. So, we can disagree on that point. But that was the question that the disciples asked of the Lord, and He begins to answer. Verses 4-13: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many

false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

This idea of enduring to the end – in other words, you are going to go through these timeframes. You are not gone from this timeframe; you are there as a believer during this time, and what you are doing is enduring to the end. You are living through, walking through these days; and at the end of all of this will be the great end-time salvation that we experience at His return, where we are changed in a twinkling of an eye. Many things transpire at these moments of what is termed “the end.” Then He says, in verse 14, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” I love what He does here, because the Lord ties this idea of the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom to this time period. In other words, the preaching of the Kingdom will happen during these days of tribulation and during this end time. Therefore, again, I believe believers will be here. I believe the church will be here, being the vehicle to preach the Kingdom. Now we have kind of taken this out of context, because we have believed that in the Great Commission, we are to preach the Word to all the world, and then the end will come. But He says, the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached as a testimony to all the nations, then the Kingdom will come; but it is in the context of these days of the end time. And so, I think because we are here, and we are enduring to the end, we are going through these things – but I want us to note the power, because there is an anointing – there is going to be a power of the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God, to bring the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations, to spread the Word. I think we are going to see people saved during this time, great times of salvation. People talk about revivals that have been foreseen by some of the great prophets of old – like Smith Wigglesworth, who saw tremendous times of restoration and revival that were coming in the days ahead. And I believe that happens.

For me, part of the concept is that there are two things that take place during the Great Tribulation. It is the final test of the wicked. The wicked will become more wicked, the days will be more evil, and people will grow in their wickedness. I think spirits will be turned loose in the earth that will drive people – that is why Ephesians reminds us that our battle is not against flesh and blood. We are not against these people. We have got to love the world as Christ did, and believe to be the vessels of speaking the Gospel of salvation to the world during this time. And as we have seen in the past, people during difficult times are very much more open to hear the Gospel. So I anticipate that we see tremendous times of miracles, healings, the Holy Spirit moving through God's people, the Word being spoken; God's people being tested in their faith, but coming through, enduring these times, to receive a great reward for their sufferings of what they go through. To me, there are two things that transpire during these days of tribulation. I know verse 9 leads us to believe that there are phases of it; and I think one of the concepts here that is alive for me is verse 8: “But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” So the Lord Himself is using the illustration of childbirth to relate to these times that come. It is interesting that Isaiah also makes reference to the birth pains that are transpiring. This is literally the birth of the Kingdom of God coming into the earth. Those birth pains are difficult. And giving birth is not only painful, it is dangerous. It is a time of life and death, both for the mother and for the child. It is a time of pain. But there are also the Scriptures that say as soon as the child is born, the pain is forgotten, and we enter into the joy that a new life has come into the world. The end of these days is going to be a time of the greatest joy, because the Kingdom of God will be born into the earth and into the world, and we are going to experience it.

As difficult as it may be, it is hard to imagine missing this. In a sense, what a privilege to be among those who will live through these times, because I think they will be some of the most God-filled times, Holy

Spirit-filled times, anointing-filled times, Presence of the Lord-filled times that the earth has seen. I think there are just a handful of key times during this age, and these ages that man has gone through, and I think this is one of them. "So count it all joy, brethren, when we suffer persecution, when we go through what we may face." And I don't know, is this starting tomorrow? It seems like it is getting closer, but I do not know when we will define the time as being the Great Tribulation. One thing that in my mind is important to do is to go back to the language of the Greek and read in Greek what is happening here. Because tribulation itself, if you just take the word "tribulation," it is not unusual to the New Testament. And if you look even in the Septuagint, so you are comparing it against things in the Hebrew Scriptures, the idea of tribulation and God's people going through times of tribulation and persecution and suffering is not new. It is not new to the Christian, nor is it new to Jewish believers. It is something that has been since the very beginning of the Church age. The Church age was born in persecution and tribulation. Christ lived in persecution and threat of His life from the time He was born. Remember, they had to sequester Him away into Egypt because Herod was seeking to kill Him and destroy Him. And it didn't end there. We think of the time of His suffering as being the time of the cross, but the truth is that Christ's life was in jeopardy all of His life. There were those who were seeking to kill Him and destroy Him. One time, they grabbed Him to take Him to a precipice and throw Him over, and miraculously, it says He passed through their midst and He was gone. But they were seeking and plotting His death for all of His life. So when we look at this idea of tribulation, one thing I think we need to do is get rid of the fear. I think we need to get rid of the feeling like this is some unusual time that has never happened before in the world. Remember verse 6 of Matthew 24: He says, "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end." When you think of tribulation and when you think of persecution, realize the reality of it, okay? It has always been here. The Church was born in persecution. Christ lived through persecution. He lived through tribulation in His life, and tribulation means trouble. It means very much like persecution. It means a time of trouble. It means going through things that are woeful, or painful. And so, this is what it is pointing to.

When you think of what has existed in the world, certainly if we take the Church since the time of the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, we know that the Church itself was born in persecution. We know that the disciples were hiding themselves in a room when Jesus walked in after the Resurrection, because they were afraid of the Romans, and they were afraid of being taken and crucified themselves. And we go on from there. We have *Fox's Book of Martyrs* that talks about the suffering and the persecutions that took place. I know that this is something that has not transpired that overtly within America; but the reality is, all through the Church, people have suffered. In this age and in this time, people are suffering greatly for their Christian faith and their testimony of Christ. And because we are buffered from it much of the time in America and other countries that are blessed by God to have been protected up to this point, that does not mean that many, even in today's world, are not suffering.

You would be surprised, thousands of Christians during this year have died for the name of Christ and the testimony that they have given through the name of Christ. And they proclaim with boldness that they are privileged in their minds to suffer as He suffered. Remember, the Scripture says, "If we suffer with Him, we reign with Him." So, the first thing I am trying to do is I am trying to disarm this idea that tribulation is some new thing that all of a sudden explodes onto the scene. I know that this is called the Great Tribulation, and I know that even Christ says that this is different than days that have been seen before. In verses 21-22 He says, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred

since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.” So, we see Christ saying, “Hey, this is going to be a time like has never been before.” He calls it the “great tribulation.” But when you look up that word in the Greek, what does it mean? It does not mean the only one of its kind. To me, one of the things that it very well can mean is the fact that what we see in this age of the Tribulation is global.

When I watched what happened with COVID, it kind of struck this chord in my own spirit to say that we are now seeing a global event different from what we normally see, which is things being isolated to certain peoples or cultures or geographies around the world. Those things may happen at several times. You can take things like World War I and World War 2, and we call it “world war”; but you can find countries that were not involved in the world war. It was not a totally global event. COVID 19 was a global event that transpired. And I think that when we say “great tribulation,” it does not mean worse than anything that has ever happened before; it could mean broader in scope. It means more complete, covering the whole of the earth. It has not happened since the world began that there has necessarily been these kinds of events that have transpired simultaneously around the globe, all at once. And so, that is one definition of it. For instance, when they came to Christ, and they tested Him, He says, in Matthew 22:35-40, “One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment’” – that is the same word for great as we have about the Tribulation – “‘which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” So we get this idea here – is the great commandment better than every other commandment? Is it more important than every other commandment? No, what the Lord is saying here is, when you have this commandment, in order to fulfill this commandment, you must fulfill every commandment that is in the Law and the Prophets. You cannot love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind and love your neighbor as yourself without doing everything else that you find in the Law and commandments.

So, you can take the word “great” and say that it is overarching. It includes everything, all that is going to and needs to transpire will transpire during this time. And I do think that that is part of what we will experience in what we call “the last days” – or if we want to not use that term because it adds maybe other events that could be confusing, we just leave it with “the Great Tribulation.” When we are in the Great Tribulation, we are experiencing things that are the overarching conclusion. These are the last days. This is the end of the age, and the Great Tribulation is a part of that event of the last days. And so, we see that all of this really transpires. When we go to Matthew 24:29-30, it says, “‘But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.’” Now notice again, when you have the coming of the sign of the Son of Man, or the return of Christ, what is unique about it? Everyone sees it. Everyone on earth – all the tribes of the earth, every person that exists on earth – all see this event simultaneously. So that is kind of in the same context of what I am saying. The Great Tribulation is something that everyone who is in the earth is going to experience at the same time. Whatever their experience is, it is going to be a great event that everyone is experiencing, and it is going to be part of this conclusion.

Remember what He starts with in verse 29: “immediately after the tribulation.” You go right from the tribulation; it is a continuum. It is a continuum of this birth process that then comes into the return of Christ – the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky. And He is answering their question: “What is the sign of Your coming?” The sign of His coming is the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky where every eye sees Him. That is the sign of His coming. There is no mistaking when He returns. He does come on the clouds and every eye sees Him. And He comes with great power and glory, and it is the wrapping up and it is the conclusion of the age. Verse 31, ““And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”” This is the conclusion. This is the end. This is when the Kingdom of God comes, Christ returns to the earth. So the Great Tribulation is a process within this total birth process.

You know, when you have a woman giving birth, she goes through stages of labor. Those stages get more intense, they get maybe more difficult, but they are getting closer and closer to what the focus is. The focus is not the pain. The focus is not what you are going through at the moment of delivery. The focus is that child coming into the earth. And we, as believers, need to see this. Honestly, there is so much fear that has been ministered that no wonder people want to run to some other answer rather than being a part of this timeframe. But, if you were having the child, wouldn't you want to be there for the events? They may not all be wonderful and lovely and beautiful and pretty, but you still want to be there. It is part and parcel of that birth process, and to miss that is to miss something tremendous, even in the ongoing life of that child – to have been there, part of seeing it happen, helping it happen; even as the father of that child, to be there helping the mother through the birth pangs, helping her through these stages. I think we should look with anticipation. You say, “Well, I'm fearful. I'm fearful of persecution. I'm fearful of pain. I'm fearful of suffering and dying.” Listen, please. Let's go back again: there has never been a time in the Church that there has not been suffering, persecution, and dying. Maybe you have not seen it in your lifetime. Maybe you do not know anybody who has experienced it. But people are experiencing it today, right now, while I am speaking. There are Christian believers who are suffering for their faith.

Let's look at it this way: you say, “Well, terrible things are going to happen like nothing has ever happened on the earth before. That is what He is saying. There has never been a time like this.” You know, there is only so much they can do to you. And I am not trying to be facetious, I am trying to get rid of the fear mongering that takes place surrounding this. Listen, believers have suffered and died. There are only so many ways they can torture you and kill you, and they have all been done to Christians up to this point. They have been done from the time of the first century, from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, until this very day today. And so, there is no new suffering that they are going to come up with that has not already happened. You know, the worst that can happen is that you die, and most people believe they are going to die anyway. Why not die a martyr's death? Now, maybe again, that is too powerful or gross for some people to hear, but many people believe that way. If you are a believer, then the greatest honor there is, is to die for the name of the Lord in His testimony and because of your faith. During this time, they are not going to come up with some new way to persecute you, or some new way to hurt you. There is not some new level of suffering beyond what believers and people have suffered. I mean, Christians have gone through terrible things. Think about Nero taking Christians and tying them to stakes and covering them with pitch and lighting their bodies on fire to light up his parties at the palace. You can't think of more horrible ways to die than what wicked men have already come up with, whether it has been during times of war, or just times of persecution, or times of the Holocaust; whatever it has been, suffering has already been perfected within the minds of the wicked. And so,

there is not a greater suffering because it is called the Great Tribulation. I believe one of the things about the greatest is that it is the last. This is the last tribulation, because immediately following this tribulation comes the Kingdom. That is a reason to call it great! What makes it great? There are not going to be any more. This is the last time that we see believers suffering, that we see innocent people suffering under the hand of the wicked. That to me is a great thing, and I rejoice in that. And we should all rejoice in it.

So, there are different ways to think about it. Again, what you have to do is take the Word of God before the Lord, your Creator, and you have to pray these things through with Him. You have to find faith in Him. And you have to find a way to walk with Him during these times. Believers have done it. He will be with you – “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” He said. You remember in John 17, Christ Himself prayed, “Father, I am not asking You to take them out of the world. I am asking You to keep them from the wicked one.” And there is a way that the Lord is going to cover us and protect us. I think about the stoning of Steven – it does not talk about whether he was suffering pain. It just says that his eyes were open, and he saw the Lord seated at the right hand of the Father. There is a way, there is a provision for us in God. If the Lord is going to have us walk through times of tribulation, He will walk with us, as He did with the three Hebrew children in the days of Daniel, thrown into the great fiery furnace. He was walking with them through it.

Whatever we will go through, we are a people of faith. Have faith and realize He is with you. “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end.” And these things, these are the things that bring us into the end and the participation with the end of the age, and He will be with us every minute of every day. Amen.