

## ***Series: Behold! The City***

### **Lesson 3: The Locked Box**

#### **Lesson Objectives:**

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Contrast our culture's images of "The End" with Jesus' teaching about the unknowability of "The End"

#### **Materials Needed:**

- ☐ Questions from the previous lesson's Task One
- ☐ Board and markers
- ☐ *Charting the End Times: A Visual Guide to Understanding Bible Prophecy*, by Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice (optional)
- ☐ Clip from an apocalyptic movie (optional)
- ☐ Double-sided copies of handout "Behold! The City: Three"
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Bibles

## **Lead In:**

Ask students if they have ever seen movies or read books about the end of the world.

Solicit answers and record them on a board. One example is Stephen King's book *The Stand* or the movie made of it. How many more examples can your group think of?

Other examples could include the *Left Behind* series of books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins and the films, *Armageddon*, *Twelve Monkeys*, *Soylent Green*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and *Independence Day*. Record their examples on the board along with a very brief description of each one.

If you are able to get a copy of Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice's picture book, *Charting the End Times: A Visual Guide to Understanding Bible Prophecy*, this would be an excellent visual aid. The book provides detailed, coloured charts and diagrams that explain biblical prophecies about the end. Pass it around and use it as an example of end times media, pointing out to the students that these authors sell millions of copies of their resources. Alternatively, you could show a favourite clip from an apocalyptic movie (see a short list above) to emphasize the same point in a visual way.

Ask students what the movies and books listed and/or shown have in common. Are they meant to be scary, happy, sad, funny? Are they believable? How would students summarize popular culture's attitudes towards the end of the world? You might say they are frightening, silly, exploitative, and so on, depending on the opinions in your group.

## **Task One:**

Have students gather in groups of three or four. Give them double-sided copies of the handout, "Behold! The City: Three," as well as pens. Instruct them to complete only Task One on the front of the handout. The instructions are on the handout.

Task One is a bit of a ruse. It would be very difficult for the students to interpret the passage; in fact, it would be difficult for even a trained scholar to interpret the passage. That is kind of the point they are to arrive at. So, after a few minutes of reading and puzzling, interrupt the groups and ask for answers. The expected answer is “Huh?”

And lest the students (or you) think that it’s just the translation that makes it hard to understand, here it is in the much easier-to-read New Living Translation. You can read it to the students to make the same point.

And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, “Don’t be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.

Use this confusion to transition into these questions. Solicit answers to each question. A sample answer is provided for each one.

1. *What does this passage have to do with the movies and books we talked about in the Lead In?* No wonder Christians and others influenced by Christian thought make weird, scary movies and books full of strange imagery. It’s right here in the Bible!
2. *Why do you think that the Bible uses this kind of language?* Students may know or may be able to guess that the language in Revelation is 1) symbolic (like all apocryphal literature, Revelation uses many symbols from Jewish thought and life), and b) old (related to the ideas and symbols of the time but more difficult for us to understand now). People can get caught up on the individual details and forget the big picture, like on those photo collages in which many small colour pictures make up a completely different, larger image. But in reality, both the Bible and our apocalyptic movies use symbols to convey what the end *might* be like and what it *might* feel like.

3. *Has anyone ever had an encounter with someone who wanted to convince you about how the world would end? Can you describe it? How did it make you feel?*

Some people are very committed to narrow interpretations of the end and want you to be just as committed to their view. An encounter with one of these people can be scary and off-putting. Let's not be these kinds of people!

## **Task Two:**

Instruct the groups to turn the handout over and complete Task Two. This one is for real; no tricks. The instructions are on the handout. Students will read Jesus' warning to the disciples that they will not know the hour of his return. They will also answer a question that relates to human desire to know the end in detail.

When students are finished, regroup for feedback. Solicit answers regarding the biblical message. The basic message is that we will not know exactly how or when the return of Jesus will take place. Second, solicit answers to the question, Why do people spend so much time trying to figure out the end? Possible answers could be that it makes a lot of money, that we all like to be in control, that people are curious about the biblical symbolism, that they want to exploit others, that they want to know what will happen to them and others, and so on. Third, solicit answers to the question of the consequences of Jesus' teaching. Students may point out that not knowing the details of the end frees us to trust God's plan and to live in the present, focusing on the living. This last idea will be central to the following lesson; you can point this out to students before moving to the final task.

### **Task Three:**

Finally, draw the students' attention to the questions left over from the previous lesson. These were questions that the students asked that they did not find satisfactory answers to in the previous lesson. Are there any that were further answered in this lesson? For example, if someone wrote "When is Jesus coming back?," students can now answer that question, "We don't know." If there are any other such questions that can be directly answered by this lesson, answer them and erase them. There may still be questions left. Depending on what they are, you can attempt to answer them together or you can decide that these also fall under the category of details that we don't know about the end. The Bible is not a giant book of answers to every question we ever posed.

### **Closing:**

It is important to bring the lesson to a close by refocusing on the *hope* that we have for the future. In other words, as we learned previously, we know that Jesus is preparing a place for us, where many are welcome, where there is no suffering, and where we will once again be in perfect relationship with God, each other, and nature. Now we also know that God is in charge of the process and that there are many things about it that are not knowable to us. So in the end, we trust and hope in God's amazing promises and God's compassion and love towards us. The future will not be full of weird and scary symbols but of God's love and compassion. And that is an awesome thought!

Close by praying for this hope and love to abound.