

The End of the World

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[0 : 0 0] It would be great if you could turn to your bulletins where there is an outline.! It's a bit of a tricky passage today, so I'll put the verses on the screen as well, but you think the end is coming helps us to prepare for it in the present. Like, you know, the end of school term is coming up, so you might prepare by booking a holiday or that sort of thing. Even if it's simply an event, knowing how the event will end helps you to prepare in the present. Like, I think I mentioned that time I went ice skating with the youth group. At the moment they mentioned that event, I knew it would end with me getting wet pants from the ice, to be clear. I remember pushing off from the side of the ice rink and then suddenly this girl was coming the wrong way, it was the wrong way, towards me, crying out, move, move! And I simply cried back, I can't, I can't! And so we collided and I went down and wet my pants. But knowing how this event would end meant I could prepare for it in the present by packing a spare pair of pants. The point is, knowing the end helps us prepare in the present, so we don't go home with wet pants or in today's passage, so that we will make it home to glory. Today's passage is about the end of the world as we know it.

It's like that 1980s song, do you remember this one? It's the end of the world as we know it. R.E.M. Does it ring a bell? It's the end of the world as we know it.

And I feel fine. Yeah, all the people who nodded were about my age. Yeah, it's the end of the world as we know it. That's what today's passage is about.

And the way to feel fine, as the song says, is to be prepared for it. In fact, Jesus even tells us what will happen before the end of the world so we can be prepared for those things too, rather than be surprised by them.

So surprised that we get discouraged and disillusioned and walk away from Christ altogether. Because the end won't happen right away. There is a delay.

[2 : 2 8] Point one, verse five to six. So in verse five, the temples talk about the temples. The disciples talk about the temple, how beautiful it is.

And in verse six, Jesus says that it's going to be destroyed. Not one stone will be left on another. Every one of them will be thrown down. Which is a huge thing to say.

We need to remember that the temple for Jews, well, it dominated Jerusalem. Just in size, there's a scale model of the temple with the city in the background.

So the size dominated the city. And it was at the heart of Jewish life. And so to say that there's no more temple is like saying to an Aussie, no more barbecues or beers, which for an Aussie, that's, you know, sacrilege, right?

To Asians, no more rice. To Greeks, no more baklava. I mean, this is a huge thing. It would have been for Jews, the end of the world as they knew it.

[3 : 3 1] And so it's no wonder in verse seven, the disciples ask for the sign about when it will happen. But it's also no wonder that Jesus doesn't answer immediately, but takes the opportunity to move from the end of the world as they know it, the end of the temple, to the actual end of the world as we know it.

And so he goes on to say in verse eight, something false teachers will come first or false messiahs. And in verse nine, he says, there'll also be wars, but these things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.

You see, Jesus seems to set up this parallel between the end of the temple and the end of the world, which the rest of the passage makes clear is what he's talking about in verse nine when he returns. But here's the point.

Neither the destruction of the temple nor the end of the world will happen right away, he says. Rather, verse nine, these things must happen first. What things?

Well, things like verse eight, where people will come claiming in his name, claiming this or claiming that, but, you know, false teachers, false messiahs. And even some claiming that the end of the world is near, like Harold Lindsay, he's older now, but a number of years ago, he predicted 2021, end of the world.

[4 : 58] Someone told me after the nine o'clock service this morning, that there's another prediction saying it's going to happen this year in May. I haven't heard about that one, have you? But I'm pretty sure it won't.

Because Jesus told us no one knows exactly when he will return. And so what are we to do? Verse eight, do not follow them. That's what we're to do, not to follow them.

It's not just false teachers who will come. Also, verse nine and 10, there'll be wars and uprisings. Verse 10, nation will rise against nation. And don't we know that at the moment? They will come as well.

And verse nine, we're not to be frightened. Why? Well, these things must happen first. He said, must happen. Why?

Well, because it's not just part of his fallen world, but also part of God's patience towards people. I mean, doesn't God want more people to be saved? Yes, he does.

[5 : 58] And so he's patiently waiting to give people more time to repent and believe, be saved. But the thing is, his patience means there's also more time for people to be sinful, isn't there?

And so rise up in war, nation against nation. Even verse 11, there's more time for natural disasters like earthquakes we've seen this weekend, famines, pestilence, and so on.

But God knows this. He allows this. He even uses this to prod people to think there must be something more, to look for something, some hope, i.e. Jesus, our living hope.

The song we started with today. And so when we turn on the news and see more war in the Middle East or cyclones off the coast or earthquakes in Myanmar, yes, we are to grieve.

Yes, we are to pray. Yes, we are to do what we can to help. But, beginning of verse 9, do not be frightened that God is no longer in control, that this world is out of control.

[7 : 14] He still is. It's just part of his plan to be patient with people so that they might have more time to repent. And before all this happened in the lives of the first disciples listening, persecution would come to them from authorities as well.

So, verse 12, he says, In Acts, it's not much longer before Peter and John are put in prison, remember.

And then Paul himself is flogged and put in prison. And then Stephen, do you remember what happened to Stephen in the book of Acts? Stone to death, yeah. It's not much longer after this.

But do notice verse 13, And so you will bear testimony to me. You could translate verse 17 more helpfully, I think, As this will give you an opportunity to testify.

Have you ever thought of persecution as an opportunity? Oh, they're giving, they're paying me out at work, Or I'm left out of invitations to go out with guys, Or catch up with some women over tea, or whatever, Because I'm a Christian.

[8 : 35] What a great opportunity! We don't often think like that, do we? But it is. It's a chance to say why. Why we do this. That it's worth it.

It's a chance to give a response. But we need to be gracious about it. Our manner and our words both matter. But we don't have to worry about exactly what to say. Verse 14, But make up your minds not to worry beforehand how you would defend yourselves.

For I will give you the words and wisdom That none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. Now, here we need to be clear that He's talking about particular situations that might come up with authorities And that sort of thing.

We are told elsewhere in the Bible, like 1 Peter chapter 3, for example, That we should always be prepared To give an answer, literally a defense, To everyone who asks us.

That's kind of a general readiness To know the gospel, you know, Jesus died for me. To give me meaning and peace in this life And hope of next.

[9 : 38] That's why I go to church on Sundays. That's why I believe in Jesus these days. We're to be prepared to give that kind of answer. But we don't always know how people will attack us in the future.

And so we won't exactly know how to answer then. And so Jesus is saying, Don't worry about what that will look like later on. You know, don't spend time worrying about what happens if a really anti-Christian neighbor moves in next door.

What might I say to them? Or what might happen if our government makes more kind of anti-Christian laws? What do we say to our colleagues then? We don't exactly know what's going to happen in the future.

And Jesus says, Well, don't worry. I'll give you the words then, either directly or through others. But this persecution won't just be from authorities. It'll also be from families.

And in fact, all people. You'll be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. And they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me.

[10 : 38] Not everyone all the time, of course. But this is the kind of thing that we're to expect. I know it sounds over the top to us, but it's not actually to others. Especially those living in predominantly Muslim countries.

It wasn't that long ago in Uganda in 2022 where a Muslim father killed his own daughter the day she converted to Christianity. It's horrific, isn't it?

It's evil. We should lament and grieve over it, but not be, well, yes, shocked at one hand because it's so evil, but not shocked that it could never happen.

And yet, despite death, verse 18, but not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm and you will win life. Now, the fact that some die, the verse before, means that winning life here means resurrection life.

And so also verse 18. The hairs of our heads may actually perish in persecution or for other aging reasons, but they won't perish forever.

[11 : 44] Those who stand firm will win resurrection life. And so knowing what must happen before the end actually helps us to be prepared for it in the present.

To kind of brace ourselves. And to not be so surprised that we get disillusioned and walk away from Christ. But stand firm through it.

You see, so much discouragement or disillusioned in life often comes from unrealistic expectations. And sometimes you see this with your own kids and things like that. You know, they take up a new sport and then suddenly they expect to be perfect at it straight away.

And then they're really hard on themselves if they can't do it straight away, that kind of thing. And sometimes they go, oh, I'm hopeless at this. I don't want to do this anymore. For example, you might decide to take up art and you expect your first painting to look like this.

This is your expectation. And then your reality turns out like that. And you go, that's it. I'm not going to do art anymore. And throw it in, walk away. Well, it can be the same for some Christians.

[12 : 44] They expect this life will be a walk in the park the whole time, always. And so when something happens to them, they're so surprised by it. The reality hits that they end up walking away from Christ.

That's why Jesus is telling us here. So we don't do that. But rather we can stand firm through them and win life despite them. Well, having explained what will come first before the end, Jesus now begins to answer the disciples' question about the sign that the temple and Jerusalem will be destroyed.

Point to verse 20. He says, when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out if they can, and let those in the country not enter the city.

For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women or nursing moms. There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.

They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. Jerusalem and the temple in it will be destroyed.

[14 : 01] Why? Well, we just read a moment ago, verse 22, because of punishment. This is the time of punishment in fulfillment of what is written.

It happened back in Israel's history. They ignored God and sinned against God despite 200 years of warnings, even more than that for the temple. And so it was destroyed and they were exiled.

Well, it's going to happen again. Because Jesus has come amongst them. Proven that he's the king who saves and yet they've rejected him.

It's why he, when he rode into Jerusalem before he went to the temple a couple of weeks ago, he looked over it. And he, what did he do? He wept. Because he knew they'd rejected him and what was coming later.

And so the temple was trampled by Gentiles, Romans. There's a Jewish rebellion. And so Titus, a Roman general, came in and squashed the rebellion without mercy.

[15 : 06] The historian Josephus says 1.1 million killed, slaughtered. 97,000 taken captive. There was lots of blood that had even started putting out fires.

That's how horrific it was. And even to this day, Gentiles still occupy the temple and Jerusalem. Until verse 24, it seems, the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled.

Which I take it to mean, in light of the other Gospels, the full number of people from all the nations, not just the Jews, but also from the nations are saved.

And then it will be restored. Some people take this to mean that once the full number of Gentiles are saved, then the earthly Jerusalem will be restored. But I think it means once the full number of Gentiles, along with Jews, are saved together, Jesus will return and the heavenly Jerusalem will come about, be restored.

You know, Revelation 21, I looked and I saw a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Either way, the point is back in verse 20. The word sign is not used, but the sign the temple will be destroyed is seeing Jerusalem surrounded by soldiers.

[16 : 26] Then you know its desolation is near. Sometimes the Bible uses the word near in terms of the next stage, which might be years away. You know, the next stage in history or the next part of God's agenda.

Kind of like when we sang, Hooli-Dooly, What Bam Boom, Jesus Christ is coming soon. But soon means that's the next big thing in God's to-do list. It doesn't mean tomorrow or next week or whatever.

It could be who knows how many years. Sometimes the Bible uses soon and near like that. But other times it uses it in terms of close or imminent, like the way we use it.

And I think that's what's being said here. Because if you see an army surrounding you, you don't just know what's going to happen next in history. You know it's going to happen soon, don't you?

In fact, it's so close, it's actually too late. I mean, it's going to be hard to escape if the army has already surrounded. Here's the sign that the temple's destruction is near.

[17 : 26] And Jesus again uses the temple as a parallel to the end of the world and repeats this idea of being near, close, imminent. Verse 25, he says, This is big stuff.

Here are the signs of the end.

And they are big. Like we saw in our first reading on the day of the Lord. You know, the sun, moon and stars will be all affected. The seas roaring, tsunamis everywhere.

The heavens shaking, people fainting. It'll be like things we've never seen before. And at that time, verse 27, the son of man will come with great glory and power to judge the living and the dead.

Now, we don't know when these cataclysmic signs will appear with Jesus' return. He's already told us that. But the moment we begin to see the signs, I suspect it's going to be too late.

[18 : 54] I wonder if this is part of the way that God will make his return unmissable because everyone in the world will know something's about to happen. Which is why people faint with fear of what's coming on the world.

Judgment, which will be worse than Jerusalem's. But for us who believe, we need not faint with fear, but lift up our heads with joy. Because after Jesus judges, comes our full redemption with resurrection bodies.

A new world. Where there'll be no more disasters or death. And Jesus reinforces this idea with a parable.

In verse 29, he told them this parable. Look, the fig tree and all the trees where they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

Now, leaves of a fig tree in Israel often sprout, well, they can sprout very late spring, but often early summer. And if they're sprouting in early summer, how close is summer?

[20 : 06] It's here, isn't it? That's how close it is. The point is that there are signs of the end, both the end of the temple and end of the world. But when they come, the judgment will be so close, it's basically too late.

Which means it's best to repent and believe now. After all, now is the time for the Gentiles. Most of us in this room are non-Jews or Gentiles. It's now for us to repent and believe in Jesus.

And so have you? Have you done that? Because that's the first way we're to prepare for his return. The end of the world is by believing in him. Unless we doubt his return, Jesus says it's certain.

At verse 32, he says, Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. In other words, his words are certain.

This will happen. In fact, Jesus says this generation will not pass away either until they've seen these things happen. This generation in Luke always refers to the current living generation.

[21 : 19] Often those who hear Jesus but end up rejecting Jesus. And so those listening to his, speak to his disciples or even those who thought they were his disciples at the time, will see many of these things from verse 8 to 24.

You know, they will see false teachers. They will see disasters and famine. I mean, Paul was collecting money for a famine in Jerusalem, remember. They will see persecution.

They will see the army surrounding Jerusalem. They will see even the temple destruction. Because it happened only 40 years after Jesus said this. Within the lifetime of this generation.

But just as the temple parallels the end, so this generation parallels future generations right up until the return.

The end of the world. Because there's always going to be some people who might begin to listen to Jesus, but end up rejecting Jesus. Right to the day he returns. Either way, Jesus is saying these things will certainly happen.

[22 : 26] Heaven and earth may pass away, but his word never will. And we here this morning can be even more certain than Jesus' first hearers. Because he has risen from the dead, as he said.

Jerusalem was surrounded by the Romans. The temple was destroyed in history. His word, in part, has already come true. And so we have even more reason to believe the rest of his word will come true.

And so knowing it's certain, we're to prepare for it. Verse 34, by being careful. Or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing drunkenness and the anxieties of life. And that day of the Lord, his return, will close on you suddenly like a trap.

We're to be careful not to be weighed down by the things of this world. You know, overindulging in things, in excesses. I mean, that's what the drunkenness refers to, excess drink, right?

We're not to get distracted or weighed down with excesses of this world, or even the anxieties of this world, the cares of this life. Whether it's our kids or our jobs, our finances, our health, whatever it is.

[23 : 32] We can be so weighed down by them that we get distracted and forget Christ altogether. And before we know it, we're far away or not even calling ourselves a Christian.

And then his return will come upon us suddenly like a trap. Verse 34. I've seen it happen. I think I've mentioned before, I've seen people that used to attend our church.

And then bit by bit, despite us trying to encourage them to keep coming, to hang in there, bit by bit they withdraw, bit by bit they keep moving away, they let work or family or those other things I mentioned distract them.

And now I've lost track and I don't even think they're Christian. I'm worried that that day will come upon them like a trap. And so be careful. Secondly, be watchful.

Mindful. That is, mindful that Jesus will return. Literally, it's to be awake to his return. Mindful so that his return shapes our lives.

[24 : 37] Like we saw a couple of weeks ago, remember? He gave us the parable about the meaners. We're to use what he's given us to serve him. Mindful that when he returns, he will reward us.

Now, well done, my good servant. Do you remember that a couple of weeks ago? We're to be mindful of his return so that when life is hard, we'll remember that it will all be made worthwhile so that we might keep standing firm.

We're to be careful. We're to be careful. Oh, sorry. We're to be watchful of Christ's return so that his return shapes our lives. And then finally, we're to also be prayerful.

Praying that we may be able to escape. Literally, it says praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things. And by escape, he doesn't mean around them so we'll never have to suffer them.

No, no, he means escape through them, standing firm in faith so that on that last day we may stand confident before Christ.

[25 : 44] When was the last time you pray for strength to keep following Jesus? I mean, we pray about all sorts of things, don't we? All the concerns of our life.

But have we prayed for this thing? I remember praying for wisdom about this passage because it's a bit tricky in places. But then I got to this part and I thought, I don't remember the last time I prayed for strength to keep going.

I often try and just follow Jesus and do it all on my own. Do you fall into that trap too? I do. But we're to pray for strength because it's easy to let the anxieties of this life distract us and weigh us down, drag us away.

It's hard to keep being mindful of his return so that it shapes our lives. So we need to keep praying for strength, don't we? The end of the world as we know it will come.

And the way to feel fine, as that song said, is to be prepared for it. Firstly, by believing in Jesus. And then secondly, by not following false teachers, nor being fearful of world events, nor worrying about what to say.

[27 : 00] But being careful, watchful and prayerful. That we might stand firm with Christ in life and then stand before Christ and win life on that day.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you for this reminder that Jesus will one day return. And knowing the end, help us to prepare in the present.

By being careful, watchful and prayerful. Help us in this, we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.