

End of the Line

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[0 : 00] So, we spend a lot of our time thinking forward, thinking about the future, as I was mentioning to the children earlier.

I think we're, in many ways, we're fascinated with the future, what is still to come, sometimes on a cosmic level, increasingly today with a conspiracy angle, but maybe also on a personal level. We think about our own lives and our own futures. What's my future going to be like? Who's my future going to be with? What am I going to do? What is it going to be like? And we recognize there's a degree of mystery with that, sometimes within as great hope, but also fear.

And all of these emotions we sense when we're thinking about the future. And I think particularly if you get older, maybe you're thinking, and I'm thinking more about the future and what our future holds, and how our future, or how our life will end, we think about that more and more.

And as I was saying to the kids, I think there's generally two emotions that go alongside our thinking of the future or the end of anything. And one is anticipation, and the other is dread.

[1 : 22] So very often we anticipate the end of something. I've mentioned, I think here, or at some place then, I've mentioned the TV film, you get it as an app, the chosen about the life of Jesus.

And it's a great film that speaks about, or a great series that's speaking about Jesus. And you can pay it forward. You can pay them money so that they can produce more episodes that will take us right to the end of Jesus' life.

There's a sense of thinking it forward and praying it forward, and there's an anticipation. Maybe already you're anticipating the end of the sermon. Maybe it's COVID, and we're thinking about, wouldn't it be great when it ends and finishes and we get back to normal?

Or much more simply, if a night shift or a week of hard studies. And there can be longing, and there can be dreaming and excitement and anticipation, thinking forward about the end of something. But also we know there can be dread, obviously. A human level dread coming to the end of maybe a holiday that you've waited for so long to enjoy.

[2 : 31] Dread, your contract at work being terminated and coming to an end. In relationships, in marriage, the dread of that relationship, that bond being broken, particularly in death and the dread of that.

And these things can fill us with dread. I don't think anyone simply lives for the moment. I think we are hardwired to consider the future.

There's a relentless looking ahead in our lives. And we're all aware that there's an end zone. We're always aware. We sometimes push it to the back of our minds, but we're aware of an end zone.

We're aware of a finishing line, even maybe not so much the younger people here, but we are aware of these things. We know that nothing stays the same. And we know that what lies ahead is either good or bad for us.

It's a delight or a dread. Our life, this world, is finite. We know that. We know that spiritually. We also know that scientifically.

[3 : 36] Nothing goes on forever. I'm afraid the traveling willbodies got it all wrong in that great song that they had, the road goes on forever and the party never ends. It's a great song, great chorus, but a lousy sentiment.

It's absolutely not the case. So when we recognize this and we see this in our lives, how is Jesus here speaking into the inevitability of this truth, that there is an end, that there is a future, that history is linear?

How does He speak into that truth here? And it's very powerful the way He does so. Because He knows the path that history takes.

He knows and He understands the path history takes. And He speaks in prophetic terms towards that in this chapter, this chapter 24 of Jesus.

It's part of three chapters where He's speaking about really the end of time and what that will involve. Now, I confess, right at the beginning of the sermon, I don't have all the answers to this chapter.

[4 : 40] This is a complex chapter. He knows, I don't. But He is speaking confidently and with authority.

There are elements to this chapter that are clear and undoubted. There are other elements that are difficult and challenging and there's not great consensus on exactly how they will work themselves out in the future.

But Jesus is reminding us here that He is in the center of history. And He is confident of what is happening and what is going to happen and what will happen because He is critical to it.

He's critical to its outworking. And He's critical to our understanding, both of our own lives and of the history of this world. What he means is that He is at the center of a linear reality of history where as He prophesies here, He is speaking into that.

And the chapter, the language of the chapter is apocalyptic. It accords with different types of apocalyptic literature in the Bible, both towards the end of the Bible and revelation, which is really lots and lots of symbols and pictures depicting different truths.

[6 : 05] And also some of the Old Testament apocalyptic prophetic writings looking forward, whether it's in Isaiah or Daniel or Joel or Zechariah and Haggai. And I think that genre of language is difficult for us, is difficult to translate, it's difficult for us fully to understand and I think the rules of language sometimes are different within it.

But what is happening in this chapter is as Jesus looks forward, as He prophesies towards the end, there are two prophecies fusing into one, two prophecies coming together.

I'll say a little bit more about them later. And one of them, one of the prophecies is going to happen quite soon in Jesus' life and according to, nearest according to Jesus' lifetime.

And then the second prophecy is about the end of history, the end of time. And one of them anticipates the other. So the first one which He speaks about, I'll say more about it in a minute in more detail, is the destruction of Jerusalem which He's anticipating in AD 70, which was a horrific event in the history of the world.

And the second prophecy is the end of the age, the second coming of Jesus. And in a sense, the destruction of Jerusalem is a cameo, a picture of the second greater destruction and the end of the world.

[7 : 28] It foreshadows, it's almost like the end of the world is a second wave, we've talked a lot about second waves just now. And in this case, it's much more dramatic and much more serious.

And theologians speak about this as, I hope I'll explain what I mean, a prophetic foreshortening. So any of you, if you're hill climbers here, if you bag them in rows, you'll know what I mean.

Because if you're walking towards, maybe walking at ground level or at the bottom of the hill and you see your summit, but you also see a summit before it and you say, oh, I'll forget to that summit, that's great, I'll just about be at the top.

And I'll just about there. They both look like they're exactly close. And so you move forward quite confidently and you climb and you climb and you eventually get to the very top of that summit.

And there's a huge long valley or glen going way down and then way up again before you can reach the second summit. So from far away, these summits look like they're just together, absolutely in the same place.

[8 : 35] But as you climb the first one, you realize there's quite a great distance before you have to go down and up before you reach the second summit. Visual foreshortening, in other words. And really that's what's happening here is that Jesus is looking forward and he's presenting two events in history and it's almost like they fuse together and they're in the same place.

But as time is revealed, there is a great distance between the two. So he's setting out the trajectory here, the path, the direction, the end game, the end of the line.

And it's interesting, it gives it here because it's in the context of his own earthly life coming to an end. Or just about at the end of Jesus' life here, and he's intensely recognizing and thinking about that, life like no other.

And it's the anchor on which he's grounding his word. What I'm about to experience, he says, has great relevance to what happens in AD 70 and then what will happen at the end of time.

And it's provoked by the disciples in verse 1 pointing out the buildings of the temple. Verse 1, look at them. And I wonder whether Jesus then immediately thought of John chapter 2 and verse 19 where he says in another gospel, destroy the temple and in three days I will raise it up.

[9 : 55] Where he links the destruction of the temple which is going to happen with his own body and with his own death and resurrection. And he goes on, say, truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

And he's speaking, introducing there a prophecy about the end of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

And really I think primarily that's dealt with in verses 15 to 28 where he talks about the abomination of desolation spoken of the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, linking the holy place with the temple.

And then goes on to say what a terrible time it will be for pregnant mothers if you're trying to flee this city, don't go in winter. And he goes on to say all these things that it will be a terrible time but it was shortened for the sake of the elect.

And that seems almost entirely to be related to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Four years before that destruction the Roman powers, the Roman authorities, the Roman soldiers, the Roman army, they besieged Jerusalem.

[11 : 08] Jerusalem and the Jewish people were becoming a thorn in their side so they wanted their destruction. And so they besieged Jerusalem and it was a brutal siege. And there was really determined opposition to it from the Jewish freedom fighters within Jerusalem.

And Jesus says in verse 33 as well, sorry verse 34, truly I say to you this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

So he's speaking to a generation who would know and would experience for the most part this terrible destruction, the Roman emperor Titus. He destroyed Jerusalem.

He destroyed its walls. He stood like the abomination of desolation. He stood in the holy place himself with the destruction of the temple around him and claimed himself to be God.

It was carnage. A million Jews were killed. Hundred thousand were taken captive. There was desperate starvation. There was cannibalism. And in around that whole time there was false Christ saying come to us, we'll let you escape but we're the Messiah.

[12 : 21] And it was apocalyptic. Even some of the Roman historians of the time thought it was the end of the world. And yet Jesus is saying the destruction of Jerusalem is the end of an era.

It's the end of a civilization. It's the end of a culture. But at four shadows, just like my death, just like your death and every other death, at four shadows a greater, more final end.

And that's the message. He's pointing forward. He's pointing forward through prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem to a greater and more terrible end event.

Now there may be multiple semi apocalyptic fulfillments like World War I or World War II, where there is endings, where there is the destruction of cultures and of nations.

But foreshadowing, what's foreshadowing? The end of time. And really from verse 36 forward, and I'm kind of cutting it in neatly, I'm chopping up neatly. It's not quite so neat in the chapter.

[13 : 26] There are bits that seem to overlap and fuse. But roughly from verse 36 onwards, we have Jesus speaking about the end of time. You know, concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the Father, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father only.

And he goes on to speak about the return of the Son of man. Or you must also be ready in verse 44 for the Son of man is coming an hour you do not expect.

And what he's encouraging us to do today, he's saying, he's encouraging us to look at the Bible and say, okay, the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus came true.

Jesus' own prophecy of his own death that he's been making recently that I will die and in the third day be raised again. It came true. AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem, it came true, and he's saying, therefore, listen to what I have to say about the end of time, about the linear nature of history, and that history is his story.

And we are part of that. History is not cyclical. We're not coming back as frogs. It's going somewhere. And it's ending as it's begun. It's not random.

[14:38] And it's not yet to be decided. It's not simply that it's finite and it will run out of steam and it will die a natural death far from it. In God's time, in God's way, we know that Jesus Christ is returning.

So that everything that we are experiencing now, all of our lives, everything that we know is coming to an end. It will pass away as he says.

Heaven and earth, he says, will pass away. And he's reminding us of where our priorities lie. So there's a definite point. There's a definite point if we look at verse 35, where heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

And again in verse 44, that the Son of Man is coming. There's a day, the rest of the word tells us a day of judgment, where every evil, where every injustice you face, where every brutality, where all unbelief, rejection of God, where every act of greed and ugliness, betrayal, lies, lovelessness, selfishness, every sinful thought that was ever imagined will come before God's justice.

Nothing will be unaccounted for, not the least, not the greatest sin. And it will stand before His perfect standard of pure and unspoiled love.

[16:04] And that day will be a day where He declares us innocent, covered in the righteousness of Jesus, or guilty as we have rejected or ignored Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Christ is saying, look, I'm here. I'm not dying just randomly. I'm dying in your place. I'm dying for you. I'm dying because I'm the rescuer.

And I'm saying, if you put your trust in me, that last day isn't a day of dread. It's a day of anticipation because of who He is. And He's reminding us of that.

And He has the authority to do so. And He wants people to consider Him. Otherwise, it's the end of hope. There's life only through Him.

But last day, He introduces eternal darkness, acknowledged guilt, and no place in His restored universe. See a little bit more about that next week, because the chapter carries on to speak about that.

[17:10] So Christ is the one who's speaking here, and He's speaking of His return as judge, not as Savior, comes once as Savior, returns as judge, not in humiliation, but in glory.

And He reminds us that that is a day of reckoning. In John chapter 5 and 22, He speaks about that as well. You know, the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son.

So because of what Jesus has done, He's given that place of judgment. And that's good, isn't it?

That's good. We all call for a day of judgment. We all call for vindication.

We all call for every wrong thing to be put right. We need that, don't we? We need that reality that wrongdoing and evil will not get away with it.

But we also need to include ourselves in that and recognize that our wrongdoing and our evil can only be dealt with by trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

[18:09] Now that's a truth that is really significant and really important, but it's often, I think, a truth that we don't want to hear. And certainly many of our friends who maybe are not Christians and we long to see as Christians, maybe they don't want to hear.

It reminds me very much of, in a completely different context, certainly, of a glorious scene from a... Probably one of the best cinematic scenes of all time, certainly in my limited understanding.

But it's Colonel Nathan R. Jessup who is played by Jack Nicholson in the film, A Few Good Men, and he's on trial for something that's happening at Wantanimo Bay, and he's a soldier in the American Army.

And he's... Tom Cruise challenges him to make a confession and challenges him about the truth.

And he says, you don't... You can't handle the truth.

You don't want the truth because deep down in places you don't talk about it, parties, you want me on that wall. You need me on that wall. It's just...

[19:14] It's a magnificent piece of acting. And he's speaking just about the fact that so often we shy away from the truth because it's uncomfortable and it's... And he's saying, now I know that it's a completely different context.

But isn't that often the way that it's truth we don't want to talk about? It's truth... Yes, we want someone to judge. We want someone in that place to judge.

But judging everyone else, not me. It's uncomfortable truth for ourselves. And we need to ask the question, is it truth you can't handle?

Is it truth you just avoid? It's truth that brings us to Jesus Christ. So he speaks about the end of time.

What are we to do then? What are we to do with what Christ says? And we can't simply just... I don't want you to brush it aside. I don't want you to think, well, that's fine for another day.

[20 : 13] Please consider the living Word of God. Verse 35 helps us to understand. I hope you can take a closer look at this chart. I haven't gone into a great detail in this 25 minutes we have together.

Verse 35 says, heaven and earth will pass away. Okay, that's really the theme. But my words will not pass away. So do we recognize the significance here of Jesus' words?

Who is the authority to say these things? Who could say something like this without being a complete madman or the living God?

Who knows the end from the beginning? You know, what sense is Jesus saying this if He's about to be nailed and crucified to a tree unless that has significance?

What is it that you think about Jesus Christ? It all boils down to that in your life and in mine, is He trustworthy? Is what He says worth considering?

[21 : 12] Can you find fault with Him or with what He says? What do you do with what has already been fulfilled in Scripture? Clearly spoken before its time and clearly fulfilled in a detailed way.

What are you doing with the challenges that Jesus puts before us here about the linear nature of history and the bigger picture which impacts all our lives because we aren't guaranteed tomorrow, even though we may think we are.

So He says, you know, way my words, you know, they're really way too... Who are we listening to? Are we listening to the transient words of people who are part of this heaven and earth that will pass away?

Or are we listening to the eternal words of Jesus? And in verse 4, right at the beginning when He's speaking to the disciples, He says, you know, don't be led astray or don't be deceived.

You don't drift far, really, the idea that picture is not drifting far from the reality that He's spoken about. Don't... You see, don't build your hope on other things apart from me and my Word and my grace and my relationship with me.

[22 : 33] You know, we can either, I guess, with regard to the future, we can have a naive optimism. We can leave and skip out the building and say, hey, everything's going to be fine. Or sometimes we can have a fatalistic kind of descent into nothingness about the future and not hope and be rather despairing.

But He says, don't drift in either of these directions, but rather listen to Christ, look to Christ and remember His great love and desire for us.

Even this passage, even for the Jewish people who listened and who heard this passage, it was a warning. He talks about fleeing from the wrath that is to come.

And that initially spoke about the destruction of Jerusalem and it was... There is at least some evidence that many of the Christians who knew of this prophecy did leave Jerusalem before its destruction in the 80s, 70.

Don't be deceived. These are the warnings of love. Things given with grace and with open arms so that we live our lives the right way. So how does it... Okay, we don't be deceived and recognize the words of Jesus.

[23 : 51] On a day-to-day basis, what does it mean for us as Christians? Well, verse 42, He speaks about a response and He says, therefore, stay awake for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Stay awake. Colossians 4 verse 2 has the saying. And it's teaching right through the New Testament, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

So He's saying keep watch spiritually. If you're a Christian, if you're 10, if you're 20, if you've been a Christian for 50 years or five minutes, He says, you have grace and the power of the spirit in us enables us to be spiritually alert and to depend on Him on a daily basis.

You know, we're in a winter, right through, you know, whether it's a winter of discontent, it's a winter of a pandemic, but like a broader level life, we're in the... in many ways, we're in winter.

And it's tough times. It's tribulation as He speaks about here, but His birth pains, He says in verse 6, because there's something coming at the end of it.

[25 : 10] And we have to live through this short time where we battle with difficulties and sadness and sometimes persecution as Christians and remember that there's something else.

Seeing God loving one another is hugely significant. If we're living as if this is all there is, you're pouring your energy, your gifts, your talents and your love into things that are passing away. It's not saying we ignore these things, but we just recognize them in the right perspective. And if you're hoping in anything other than Jesus for meaning and identity and direction and hope and life, then you're relying on something that can never take you beyond the grave, that never lasts further than this life.

And so He asks us to watch, to be alert, to remember this is a difficult time. It's not easy. We need Him. We need prayer.

We need one another. We need worship. We need the Holy Spirit. We need, as He says in verse 13, to persevere. It's tremendously significant to endure to the end and then we will be saved and to know that endurance.

[26 : 38] So in many ways when you first read that, it's a bleak chapter, isn't it? And it's a difficult chapter and there seems to be confusion and things that don't necessarily fit into a timescale.

And there's no getting away from that. But can I remind you of a beautiful three words that are in it as well? I mean, it's all beautiful in its own way.

Verse 32, the last three words of verse 32, summer is near. In many ways it's a chapter of judgment. It is a chapter of judgment and there's a bleakness and a kind of a heaviness to it as well because of that.

But aren't the beautiful words, summer, Jesus says, He's going to the cross. He's going to face the power of darkness and hell and death and the grave and the wrath of God. And He says still, look, summer is near.

It's a glimpse. It's a glimpse that He's speaking in the context of rescue and of provision and of hope and of love. He's saying, I know this is winter.

[27 : 40] I know this is bleak. I know it's difficult. There's no doubt about it. But He's saying summer is coming and it's not going to be a Scottish summer.

Summer is coming, He says. In Him, He says even now, the greatest of days, it's going to be nothing compared to what's to come.

And we saw the end coming, we can anticipate. You know what it's like in Scotland on a beautiful winter's day. And there are some really beautiful winter's day, but it's crisp and it's cold, but it's really sunny and it's a beautiful blue sky.

And you can wrap up and you can almost feel the warmth in the sun. And it anticipates, if you find a sheltered spot, it can almost feel warm.

Well, Jesus is saying, oh, it's winter time. If you find your sheltered spot in me, you'll begin to feel the warmth of what lies ahead.

[28 : 47] Something beautiful, something that will not fill you with dread but will fill you with anticipation. The future holds dread for a lot of people. But in Christ, it can be an anticipation because summer is near.

And I would implore us all to consider that challenging truth from Jesus very powerfully in our own lives. Let's pray together. Father God, we ask and pray that You would help us to understand the complexity of this world, the reality that sometimes things are just out of sync, that things are broken, things are upside down, things are not as we would wish them to be.

And even our longings seem to have so many misguided and selfish and misdirected ambitions. And Lord, we know that only You can put that right in Christ, can redeem and rescue and re-birth us so that we are living as we were intended to live facing Jesus, dealing with all that would separate us from You.

And help us to persevere, help us to run and find shelter in You so that we might feel the warmth of Your grace even in the wintertime of this life.

And enjoy and celebrate and think forward to the last great day, not with dread but with anticipation. And Lord, for any who take up this message, who hear the sermon maybe, who just plug online maybe for whatever reason, who maybe never even listened before or who've listened many times before but have never been challenged by the relevance of the gospel to their lives and to their future, may this be a day when You bring people to know Yourself and Your grace and love as they run to You for rescue, for forgiveness, for hope and for a future.

[30 : 49] We ask it in Your precious name. Amen.