



The End of the World as We Know It (24:36-44)

Jon Ludovina
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Personal Intro/Father's Day:

Good Morning and Happy Father's Day City Church! My name is Jon Ludovina and I'm a pastor at Midtown Fellowship in Columbia, South Carolina. Couple things as we get started:

1. Planting - Being a pastor for the last 16 years has been one of the greatest honors in my life. And as we've pastored, we've had the opportunity to send out a number of church plants including City Church here in Knoxville. I love church planting. It's amazing to see the fruit of what Jesus has done here.

And at the same time, sending out people you love is painful. It's what we call "gospel goodbyes". There's a lot of sacrifice involved. People uprooted their lives giving up established relationships, jobs and security to start City Church. Saying goodbye to Kent, Ana, Jeff and Callie, the Antals, the Williamsons, the Freemons, Von Fanges, Bitterman and Shady Baade.... That's a sacrifice. Because these people were not just coworkers and church members. They're dear friends. And so without being too dramatic I can say factually, my life is worse without them... Our church is by far worse off without them... but being here and seeing your church thriving, is a beautiful reminder that the normal everyday sacrifices of God's people for God's mission... they're *worth it*.

So this is all my way of saying thank you for loving these folks that we've given to you. No one here asked me to say any of this. I just wanted to say I love the people that moved here to start this Church and through them at some level, I love all of you too.

2. I love that it's Father's Day - I love dads! I love being a dad! (Show pic of family.) My wife Erica and I have 5 kids. Being a dad is one of the greatest honors of my life. And a huge part of my love for dads and being a dad is that God relates to us as a Father. A loving Father. A gracious Father. A perfect Father. So to all the dad's in the room doing your best to reflect God's perfect Fatherliness, Happy Father's Day! Let's give 'em a big round of applause City Church.

- And at the exact same time, I know days of celebration like this can also be painful. Some of you have complicated, broken relationships with your dad. Some have lost your dad recently. Some want to be dads and that hasn't happened for any number of reasons. Some of us dads are going through painful parenting situations. I relate. I had a complicated and broken relationship with my dad. He died unexpectedly a few years ago and Father's Day 2020 was the last time I talked to him. Whatever you're going through, I feel your pain and I'd love to take a minute to pray before we dive into our text for today. **Pray.**

Sermon: Grab your Bibles and flip open to Matthew 24. I thought Kent did a great job last week setting up these weeks as y'all work through Jesus teaching the disciples about things to come. Last week there was a lot to unpack about what exactly Jesus was even talking about and Kent unpacked how a good number of those things were fulfilled in AD 70 with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. ***The end of the world as they knew it.***

Today in our passage and in the next couple weeks looking at Jesus' parables in Matthew 24 and 25, there's a bit more clarity that Jesus is now talking about His second coming. What the Scriptures will sometimes refer to as the Day of Judgment or just The Day. What we could call ***The end of the world as we know it.*** And for Jesus, *there is no question of if.* He sees the end of the world as a coming reality.

And now that I've said those nice things about Kent, let me officially file my first complaint: See I told Kent I was coming up to Knoxville for a family vacation and I'd be happy to preach for him to give him a Sunday off on Father's Day, and he said "That's great I'm gonna be out of town some that weekend" and so I'm thinking "That's a wrap. I'll do a nice father's day message... dust

something off from the repertoire...” and he texted back and said “Dude, thanks again. We got you locked in for that date... and you’re preaching on the rapture.”

And I’m fairly certain I cussed in my office.

Like of all the things in the vast, majestic, incredible counsel of God’s Word... eschatology - the study of end things - is categorically the thing I care about least. Not just because of preference. But because ***understanding and interpreting prophecy is complicated.*** So much of it can’t be understood correctly until you see it in retrospect after it comes to pass... like here’s the best example I can think of: ***think about how many people studied prophecy about the Messiah their entire lives ...*** and still totally missed Him when He came... cause it’s hard to interpret it correctly until it happens!

And then there’s also the fact that most people I’ve known who are really into this stuff don’t seem to bear a ton of spiritual fruit in terms of actual Christlikeness... and then on top of that, a lot of self-proclaimed “experts” on end times are people I find very untrustworthy, puffing themselves up a lot about their special knowledge... and then leveraging people’s desire for their special secret knowledge as a means of financial gain... and then there’s the fact that this passage ISN’T. EVEN. ABOUT THE RAPTURE. KENT. (sidenote: we’ll unpack that in a bit)

And so... ***it’s just a real joy*** to be preaching this passage to you fine people today.

And while I don’t want to do any of those annoying things preachers sometimes do with these texts, I do agree with something Kent said last week, that for many Christians in our day, we could benefit by thinking a bit more about what Jesus has to say about things to come.

So I want to read back through our passage, and then pull out some threads that I hope will be insightful and helpful for us as we follow after Jesus. Sound good? Alright, Matt. 24:36

36 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **37** As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; **39** and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. **40** Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. **41** Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. **43** But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. **44** So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

I want to look at 3 aspects of the End that Jesus gives us insight on in this passage. The timing of the end, the nature of the end, and the importance of the end. We’ll move quick through 1 and 2 and then spend the lion’s share of our time on #3.

1.) The timing of the end.

Did you notice how many times Jesus mentions the timing of the end in this passage?... did you pick up on a pattern in what He says about its timing? Look back at v. 36 -

36 - “But about that day or hour **no one knows,**” (anything stand out? How bout 42 -)

42 - “**you do not know** on what day your Lord will come.” (anything? How bout 44)

44 - “the Son of Man will come at an hour **when you do not expect Him.**”

That’s what you might call a theme... And it’s not just here. The next parable in Matthew 24:50

50 - “The Master of that servant will come **on a day when he does not expect Him and at an hour He is not aware of.**” (Next chapter.)

Matt. 25:13 - **Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.**

Acts 1:7 - [Jesus] (referring to His return) said to them: “**It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority.**”

Over and over. No one knows. It’s not for you to know. It’s not for you to try to figure out. So for people to conclude that Jesus’ desire is for us to decipher exactly when He will return and then give there lives to that endeavor... you just have to *overtly ignore a lot* of Jesus to land there.

But now catch this... Jesus also doesn’t say, “nobody knows, so don’t worry about it.” Doesn’t matter. Just fuggedaboutit. Quite the opposite. He says over and over rather than focus on the precise timing ... focus on **a posture of imminent readiness.** Look back at vs. 42 -

42 “because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” What comes right before that? “**Therefore keep watch,**” (not ignore it. Not don’t worry about it. No. Keep watch. V. 44 -)

44 “because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him...” What comes right before that? “**So you must be ready,**” (ok one more. Matthew 25:13 -)

Matt. 25:13 - Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

See what I mean? Jesus is saying **when it comes to timing, don’t focus on the precise ‘when’, focus on a posture of imminent readiness.** In other passages, when Jesus talks about the timing of the End, He often uses words like “soon”.

Pool party. So I’m a friend’s house with my kids for a pool party couple weeks ago. It’s almost time to go so I tell my kids, “get ready, we’re leaving **soon**”. And they all groan. So I give them the “No I’m serious” dad face and they start to get ready... And then they’re ready and all of a sudden they flip flop. Get impatient... “Dad...when are we leaving??!”... Gotcha! Parenting jedi mind-trick. You now have a posture of **imminent readiness** and that was my goal... the. Whole. Time.

Now the question is “Why?” Why does Jesus want us to have this posture of readiness? Because He’s a good shepherd who **knows life on planet earth can be distracting and sedating.** So He’s giving His disciples a warning: don’t get distracted. Don’t get drowsy. Don’t sleep on the End.

See when Jesus says **keep watch** in v. 42, He’s evoking the image of a watchman. For a watchman there are two great dangers. Distraction and drowsiness. Lose your focus or get sleepy. Either one allows the enemy to attack in a way that is unnoticed and deadly.

So I don’t know you all well but I’m guessing that when I mention a watchman, the moment of cinematic masterpiece that comes to your minds is Harry Potter, yeah? ... Chamber of Secrets? Remember the big three-headed dog Fluffy standing watch over the trapdoor entrance until what happens... magic harp right? Fluffy gets drowsy. Bad watchman... err dog.

So in this analogy... Jesus doesn’t want us getting lured to sleep by magical harps of sin...

--> **Yeah it’s silly but you’re gonna remember it. Ok, that’s the timing of the End. Jesus doesn’t want you to focus on the when... but instead to live with a readiness that this life is short, eternity is long and the End is coming even if it feels really far away.**

2.) The nature of the end.

I mentioned this earlier, I’d like to reiterate. Jesus is not talking about a rapture. He’s not talking about his people getting whisked away in joyful delight. He’s talking about a day of judgment.

But, but, but... v. 40 says two men will be working in the field and one will be whisked away! V. 41 says two women will be grinding at the mill and one will be taken away! Boom! Undeniable proof Jesus is talking about the rapture! I read the Left Behind books!!

And of course the only problem with that is... the Bible. Specifically here, the key is v. 37: “**As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.**” That’s Jesus’ context. He says He’s using the flood in the days of Noah as a metaphorical picture for what the coming day of Judgment will look like. So think about this... which people were taken away by the flood in the days of Noah? The people being saved by God’s grace or the wicked? (pause) The wicked. The ones who ignored God’s warnings. Not the righteous.

That’s what v. 38 and 39 say. The people ignoring God’s warning, carrying on without a worry in the world... they are the ones for whom - “**the flood came and took them all away.**”

Jesus’ isn’t talking about His people getting raptured away yay! He’s instructing His disciples to think well on God’s judgment of sin that could take you away at the end just like the flood did.

--> **Now maybe you’re hearing all of this and you’re just squirming: “Ugh, judgment. I don’t like thinking about God’s judgment or wrath. Shouldn’t we just focus on God’s love. Love is all you need. Jesus said that right? It was on His yellow submarine album I think...”**

But the truth is when Jesus brings up the days of Noah, He’s referencing more than just the flood. We likely think of the Sunday school version of the story with a boat and cute animals and a flood that killed everyone...But for these disciples who had memorized much of the Old Testament they would have known some really pertinent details about the days of Noah.

- Genesis 6:8 says “**Noah found favor in God’s sight.**” The word favor there is the Hebrew word for grace and it’s the first time it’s found in the Scriptures.
- Also while the flood is a definitive picture of God’s judgment of sin and evil and wickedness, it’s also a picture of His gracious patience and provision. He gives Noah a

gracious warning. He didn't have to do that. He tells Noah to build a boat as a means of gracious salvation. God didn't have to do that. He does because He's loving!

- Also, **2 Peter 2:5** calls Noah *"a preacher of righteousness."* So it's likely that while this crazy man is building a very weird at the time massive wooden structure he calls a boat in the middle of a desert... for around 75 years mind you... he's preaching to anyone who will listen. Any curious neighbors who come by. "God's judgment is coming but He's made a way for us. We can repent and believe. You can get in the boat!" And no one listened. No one converted. The days of Noah aren't just a picture of God's wrath, but also a compelling picture of His patience and grace.

One more thing before we leave this section: It's more than a bit hypocritical for us to think we are allowed to get angry at evil but God isn't. Like we get irrationally angry when someone cuts us off in traffic... but God isn't allowed to have righteous anger over centuries of brutal war, human trafficking, oppression of the poor, and vicious rape culture? It's not like these are anomalies. These things litter human history. It would take a woefully uninformed, naive or cynical view to look at human history and come to the conclusion... God is just really angry and punishing people all the time. The more accurate and the Biblical picture is that God is constantly... patiently... allowing humans to ruin themselves and His world while He's also graciously inviting us back into His love and His redeemed family. Over and over making ways for His lost children to receive His grace.

--> So Jesus' teaching here serves as both a sobering warning about God's judgment AND a beautiful reminder of His patient love. That's the nature of the end. Which leads us to #3:

3.) The importance of the end. I want to give us a few reasons why all of this matters. I'll start simple and build in complexity as we go.

- Ok first and most simply, if you're a Christian... If you claim Jesus as king... and He cares enough about the End to teach about it, then might we *at least* consider that we should care about it too? Might we consider that part of why we don't naturally care about all of this is because Jesus is right and this world and all its trinkets are intoxicating and distracting and our sometimes our hearts long more for the pleasures of this life than life eternal with Him to come?

I'm concerned for some of us, that we don't care that much about the End because we really love the things of this world, and functionally don't believe that eternity with Jesus will be **better**? Could it be that sometimes we want Jesus to be our life coach or our therapist whose job is to make our lives more comfortable here... when in reality He's our King who is calling us to die to ourselves as we pursue Him and His kingdom above all? It reminds me of this quote I love:

J.I. Packer - *"Still he seeks the fellowship of his people, and sends them both sorrows and joys in order to detach their love from other things and attach it to himself."*

--> Maybe that's your takeaway for today. King Jesus is working to detach you from this world and attach you to Himself a bit more. Maybe that's all you needed to hear today. (pause. #2)

Importance of the End Part 2: The End is of unbelievable importance to those who have known vast injustice - Miroslav Volf, sums this up better than anyone else I've heard. Volf is a pastor and theologian who was born in Croatia and watched the Bosnian War destroy his homeland. Listen to what he has to say about God's judgment and wrath:

Miroslav Volf - *'I used to think wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? [...] My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come [...] 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination [...] How did God react to the carnage? By dotting on the perpetrators in a grandparently fashion? By ... affirming [their] basic goodness? [...] Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love. ... if God were not angry at injustice and did not make a final end of violence, that God would not be worthy of our worship.*

Do you hear what he's saying? If God isn't angry, if He doesn't judge wickedness, if there is no day of judgment coming when all violence and evil ends for good. If there is no End to injustice in this broken world; then he's not loving and we can't trust Him.

And throughout human history, those who have experienced the most injustice, the most pain, the most oppression, the least hope for legal vindication here on earth... have often found great hope that every criminal, every evildoer, every perpetrator will one day face God's judgment. It means you can forgive. It means you don't have to seek vengeance. It means you can trust God who sees all and knows all and is perfectly just..

--> **Ok, that's the importance of the end for those who have faced injustice. Let's consider a third reason the End is important:**

Jesus wants the end to shape how you live your entire life.

Back at my home church, we have a series of leadership values. And one of my favorites is *Lead with the End in Mind*. It's the idea that before you get moving you should really figure out where you're going. A thousand decisions are made along the way by knowing the destination. And that's true on small levels and zoomed out at much larger levels of decision making.

Frank Ludovina: So I was a sophomore in college when I found out my dad was having an affair on my mom. And then he decided to divorce my mom and remarry the woman he was having an affair with. And it was just crushing for me. My dad had been my hero. Bedrock of our family. And there was a local pastor, Dr. Adams, who was kind enough to meet with me and counsel me through this devastating time of my life. And I'll never forget when he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "Jon... your dad's not thinking about who's going to be at his funeral." And that thought just kind of hung in the air for a moment. Devastating.

Flash forward 17 years... 3 years ago and I'm sitting at my dad's funeral... and it was one of the most awkwardly painful funerals I've ever been to. Every family member there was filled with a mixture of love and mourning but also all kinds of pain and unresolved conflict. It was not the kind of celebration you'd hope for at the end of your life.

Steve VF: And then in contrast, a number of years ago, I had the privilege of officiating a funeral service for a member at Midtown named Steve Von Fange. See Steve started coming to our church because his college-aged son, Jesse, was coming to our church. Some of you know Jesse and his wife Kelsey were some of the folks who moved here to help plant City Church years ago.

Well back in 2012 our church was 5 years old and our average age was about 22. And Steve and his wife Sharon were in their 50s, empty nesters more spiritually mature than the rest of us combined... and they decided to give their lives to our church. It was amazing.

See Steve was a voracious business man, but he chose to retire at the age of 55 because his father and his father's father had both died at 57 years of age. So he reverse engineered his entire life in light of the end. And in retirement, he asked us if he could come on staff with us *for free* so he could be a pastor to our pastors. That's what he wanted to do with his final years here on earth. I'm speaking of the end at two different levels. See Steve lived his entire life in light of the end of his life here on earth... And Steve also lived his life in light of The End. The Jesus' Return End of the World as Know it End. It changed everything about how he lived.

His funeral was standing room only in our church building with a crowd of 800+. It's one of the largest gatherings we've ever had. His brother was speaking and asked the 800+, raise your hand if Steve ever gave generously to you in a way that met a need you had no idea how to handle.

Almost every hand in the room went up.

So why is it important that Jesus points us to the End? Why is it important that our Good Shepherd graciously warns and reminds us that a day of judgment is coming?

Because whether you know it or not, ***everyone of us will someday write the last chapter of our lives.*** And we're setting the foundation for what kind of last chapter we are going to write.

And the difference between my dad, Frank and Jesse's dad, Steve, is that my dad got lulled to sleep by the pleasures of this world. He lost sight of the End. But Steve heeded Jesus' warning and allowed the end to keep him locked in. On watch. It changed how he viewed himself. It changed how he viewed other people. It changed how he viewed and lived every day of his life.

Steve was one of the most beautiful pictures I've ever seen of **Psalm 90:12** - *"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."*

And so I've gotta ask, "Are you living your life in light of the End? Are you thinking about the kind of last chapter you're going to write? Have you considered who will be at your funeral? Have you started noticing the wrinkles on your face... the pains in your joints whispering... "You're not eternal. You are breaking down. The end is coming."?"

--> And if I just ended here, that wouldn't be wrong... but I do think it would be incomplete.

See the last way in which Jesus' teaching on the End is massively important is that it reminds us in stunning color of our need for His grace. **The end reminds us how much we need the gospel.** Just like Noah and his family needed God to provide a gracious way through his day of judgment in the flood, we all need God to provide a gracious way through the coming Day.

No one passes the test of God's judgment on their own.

Just like Noah, we need God's favor. We need His grace.

For Noah God provided a boat.

For us, God has provided His very own Son. He's given us His own flesh and blood to live and die in our place.

See it's the end of Jesus' life that gives us hope for the end of our lives.

Steve did as well as any human I've ever seen living in light of the end and writing the last chapters of his life. But he didn't do it out of some terrible fear of God's judgment or some guilty sense that if he didn't do good enough, God would hate him.

Steve was filled with an overflowing sense of awe at God's grace to Him in Jesus.

God's generosity to Steve through Jesus flowed out of Steve with unbridled generosity

God's love toward Steve flowed out in His love toward those He met.

- So I don't know where you're at today. Maybe you're hearing this and feeling "I've wasted my life. I've not reverse engineered in light of the end." The point isn't "oh no! You've blown it." The point is that this very moment, this passage, this Sunday may indeed be God's grace to jolt you awake. This world is not all there is. An end is coming. And God's love for you is so overwhelming that He took His own wrath onto Himself to save you from it!

- Maybe you're earlier in your life and you haven't really wasted it yet but this is an opportunity to get ahead of the curve. Don't be so caught up in the pleasures of youth with your body that works, wrinkle free with no back pain... Don't sleep on the end and wait until you have a ton of regret to go ... "Hmm maybe I should have considered the end."

Wherever you're coming from, however you're hearing this... today, on Father's Day, I want to invite all of us to consider the weighty grace with which our perfect Heavenly Father calls us to consider the End of days, the end of our days on this earth and let that last day and that last chapter rewrite all of our short days from this day until that (optional) Imminently ready, fueled with Jesus' grace and giving our lives away as much as possible for the sake of the eternal kingdom that is to come.

Let's Pray.

(land on communion)