

Title: The End of all Things
Text: Matthew 24.29-31
Theme: The 2nd Coming of Christ
Series: Matthew #108
Prop Stmtnt: The coming of Christ confirms the dread of the wicked and the joy of the saints.

Read Text:

“We were robbed over the weekend.” I listened to a guy this week who told me how someone broke into the business he works at. He said that they came through the roof. They tore up the AC unit and came through the ductwork and ripped up the ceiling. Once inside they just tore everything apart looking for money, but the business doesn’t keep any money there, so they just made a mess. His insurance papers were missing. The surveillance cameras were not that great and the images were so grainy that you really couldn’t tell who they were. Maybe they could get some fingerprints, but most likely the guys who did this will never get caught. He was disgusted, frustrated, and just about done. You know what I mean? He was done in the sense of wondering what the purpose of everything was. Why work so hard only for someone to ruin it? It makes no sense.

Many of you know what he means. You’ve felt this way too. You’ve been robbed. Your health has robbed you of doing things that you wanted. Or you’ve been robbed of a spouse or a child and therefore of a future with the person you loved. You’ve been robbed of an opportunity at work, a job, a position, a grade, a scholarship, a place on the team, a meaningful relationship or worse, the affection of your dad or mom. You ask the same question. What does it matter? To what end? When every card in my hand seems to always get trumped does it really matter if I even play?

Have you come to the place in your life when you are confronted with the harsh reality that this is your life? When you are a child well-meaning people may have told you that you can become anything that you want to be. And you believe them. You set your sights high. And over time reality sets in, doesn’t it? As a child I set my sights on playing in the NFL. After all, I was born in Canton, OH, the cradle of football and the nursery of the NFL. In my town every newborn boy went home from the hospital with a football. OB-GYN doctors did not tell mothers in labor to push, they shouted, “hike.” In the 9th grade I was 4’11” and 98 lbs. I wasn’t going to play professional football. I couldn’t even play on the freshman squad. That was my reality. It’s like being a Lions fan. You finally realize that they will never win it all. In fact, they may not win at all. Now, that kind of stuff is sort of funny, but the truth is, it is difficult to come to grips with our limitations. What if you don’t write a bestseller? What if you don’t become the CEO or CFO or even a manager? What if you realize that you really are not the smartest person in the class? What do you do when you realize that my spouse is probably not going to change? What do you do when the symptoms are confirmed as a chronic, never-ending, life-altering diagnosis for you, or your child? This is, this, right here with all of its unresolved rawness and hazy future is my life. I thought I was destined for greatness. I thought I would do better than this. I never dreamed that things would be like this. Do you even think about

those things, or do you just push them into a drawer in your mind that you close and rarely if ever open and look through again?

Jesus faced disappointment. Jesus faced failure deeper than anyone has ever faced failure. The reality that his own people would not accept him, would not believe him, would not trust him, would not follow him but instead would betray him, would actually hate him, resent him, deny him, despise him, condemn him and crucify him was settling upon his soul. The weight of this would crush him. He did everything perfect, and in one sense, it would not matter. He was Jesus and they did not love him. The fact is, they did not love him because he was Jesus. Why did he bother? To what end? If everything that he did would be twisted and thrown in his face, why did he do anything?

Hebrews 12.2 says that “for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross....” What was the joy that was set before him? How big was this joy that drove him to endure so much? How certain was this joy that he would endure the deepest valley of despair that has ever been encountered by one person? And, what was that joy? That joy was not only fulfilling his Father’s plan and completing his mission. That joy was not only in being reunited with his Father and sitting with him at his right hand. But when Christ died for us, he secured us. He secured his bride because he paid for our salvation. He bought us as his own. And part of the immense joy that drove him to endure an immense grief was this reality. He is coming again. He is coming to take back that which belongs to him. He is coming to get his bride. He is coming to take his kingdom. He is coming to rule. He is coming to set things right. That means that he is coming to judge. That means that he is coming to track down, arrest, convict, pronounce judgment, and sentence on all who refuse him. The return of Christ, also known as the coming of Christ (2nd) is the sobering, weighty and glorious end of all things. That means that if I am a follower of Christ that whatever is “my life now” is not all that there is. In fact, it is only for a while. Then is so much bigger than now.

Jesus is in the final week of ministry before his death on the cross. His disciples are stunned to hear Jesus say that the Temple is going to be destroyed. They ask him when that will happen and what will be the signs of his coming and the end of the age. Jesus answers the first question in verses 15-26 and as he does he makes it clear that the destruction of the Temple is a preview of a greater destruction that is going to come upon the world. This time of tribulation, chaos and destruction is going to be unlike anything that the world has ever seen before. But, stay the course. These things have to happen and then the end will come. And this time, the coming of Christ will not be a secret. This time the entire world will know that Christ has come. Here is why:

I. **The Coming of Christ will be marked by Cosmic Disturbance.** (29)

I have read so many studies on how data on the climate has been manipulated for political reasons that I am very jaded on the entire subject. But, this is one aspect of climate change that I am certain about. Jesus says that the universe (not just the earth), but the universe will feel like someone put the whole thing into a paint can shaker and turned it

on high. When the sun and the moon are messed up, then our entire existence is in serious jeopardy.

The OT prophets spoke of the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord referred to an event or a time when God intervened in a more obvious manner. Some of the events the prophets predicted had an immediate and an ultimate fulfillment. For example, in Isaiah 13, Isaiah speaks about the Day of the Lord's judgment that comes upon Babylon, but then Isaiah widens the lens and he speaks of the Day of the Lord upon the entire earth. Once again, the judgment that God was going to bring upon Babylon was a preview of the judgment that God was going to bring upon the earth. In Isaiah 13.9, 10 we read, *"Behold, the day of the LORD comes to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light."* Later on in chapter 34 Isaiah speaks of the anger of the LORD against all the nations (v.2) and says in v.4, *"All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree."* Jesus is explaining what Isaiah was pointing to. These are the signs of the return of Christ.

But think about this. Does it not make sense that the coming of Christ, the coming of the Creator would be marked by major cosmic disturbance? After all, this event is THE event that stands as the culmination of all history. Christ's coming is the point. While the cross is the central event of history the return of Christ is the goal of history. What was going on before there was history? What was God doing before creation? God was enjoying the relationship that he has and is as God. The Father, Son and Spirit loved, enjoyed and were satisfied in their fellowship as God. In trying to describe that, we call this interpersonal relationship, Trinitarian. God the Father so delights in his Son that he created the entire universe as a gift and kingdom for his Son to rule. This universe, this kingdom would be an arena for the glory of his Son. And so God created millions of angels as the audience who were stunned and amazed at God's creative work. As part of that work God made the galaxies, the solar systems, including ours. And God determined to create this planet as the focal point of his handiwork. This would be the place where he would make a garden, a place, a kingdom and a people where he would dwell with and enjoy these people who would in return enjoy and magnify the goodness and greatness of God. This is the beginning to the most amazing story ever written. This is the story that holds all other stories. This is the story that makes all other stories make sense. But, this is the story that our world rejects. We spend billions of dollars trying to investigate the origin of our world because this is the account that we refuse to embrace

Our world has this story, but it does not want this narrative. It wants a different story so that it can claim complete autonomy. But when our world denies its own story, it is denying its own identity and its own history. And when it does that it not only denies truth, it ends up with sheer emptiness. Here is what I mean. The story of creation, fall, redemption and restoration is the story of a personal God who made us for relationship. When, in rebellion, you refuse to believe in the personal God who made the world then you are left with your world and your life being the chance product of impersonal forces. That means that you are the statistical improbable chance product of impersonal forces.

Do you know what that means? You are an accident. You have no meaning. You have no purpose. There is no meaningful past and you have no meaningful future. There is no right and no wrong. There is no injustice because there is no justice. In the final sense it does not matter if you serve orphans and lepers in India or if you rape girls in Sudan. It does not matter if you feed the homeless in Detroit or if you help gas Jews in concentration camps. It does not matter because the only thing that matters is matter.

Bertrand Russell put it eloquently and pathetically when he said, *“That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins ...only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.”*

If evolution is true and there is no God, no personal creator, no ultimate story, then why do we tell our children that we love them? Why do we love them? Why do we tell them that their artwork is good and meaningful and that we are proud of them and hang it on the refrigerator or put it in a scrapbook. Why aren’t we honest with them and look them in the eye and say, it does not matter what you do because you don’t matter. I am throwing your artwork in the trash because you are going to be thrown into the trash one day. Why are we horrified w/ a gunman murdering teachers and students? Why does anything bother us or concern us? Those who try to believe the lie of “no God” and “no story” do not believe their own words.

Our music, our art, our history, our lives, our families, our feelings, our passions, our values, our goals, our desires all betray that. Our world lives in this enormous tension that is tearing itself apart. We don’t want God to rule over us, so we have to wipe him out of history, government, science, public discourse and life. But throwing God out of life means we throw out the very source of life and meaning. But, here is the real truth and the good news. There is an end to this story because this life that we have is a narrative that has been written by God. God has made you for a purpose and life has meaning. The innate sense that you are born with, that intuitiveness that you have that there are morals, there are categories for right, wrong, true, false, good, bad, excellent and inferior are stamped within your soul by the very breath of God. God made this world. God governs this world. God came into this world and here is God saying, I am coming back. It is going to feel like a major cosmic event because it is a major cosmic event. This is the end for which I created the world. This is the culmination of all things. This is the vindication of God. But that means two more things: It means that wickedness and evil will stand and give an account and that righteousness will prevail.

II. The Coming of Christ will be marked by power and judgment. (30)

The cosmic disturbances are not just signs that the end is coming, but they are themselves part of the judgment of God upon this earth that has rebelled so consistently against God. I believe that what Jesus says here is consistent with Revelation 16. I believe that there is coming upon this earth a time of tribulation when the people of the earth, under the formal leadership of a ruler who sets himself up against God will get a serious case of buyer's remorse. And I believe that the tribulation is multi-faceted. I believe that the government of this Antichrist will be full of promises of hope and change but will end up being a colossal failure that is marked by intrigue, deception, and total dictatorial control. The internal strife and animosity will only be heightened as epic "natural disasters" being to destroy the world. That is Revelation 16. These epic disasters are the bowls of God's wrath being poured out upon the earth. But the earth does not repent. The kings of the earth only harden themselves in rebellion and refuse to admit their sin. Their hatred against the Jews, historically known as the people of God, is a thinly disguised expression of hatred against God. As they gather for the ultimate final solution to the Jewish question, Christ returns. His return has multiple purposes, but one of them is to arrest and hold accountable all those who rebel against him. Jesus says that when the Son of Man comes in power and great glory that "all the tribes of the earth" will mourn. I take that to mean that the people all over the world will mourn. And I believe that mourning has two aspects to it.

One, I believe that for most it will be a regret but not repentance. Think of Judas Iscariot. I believe that for others it will be a mourning that leads to repentance. Think of Peter. Zechariah speaks of the Day of the Lord when the Messiah comes in power and glory and in that day (12.10-13.1) Israel looks upon the Messiah as the one they have pierced and they mourn as a parent mourns for an only child. They mourn with repentance but their mourning leads to a cleansing from sin and from uncleanness. But, for many the coming of Christ is their worst nightmare because they all tried to convince themselves that there was no God, there was no Christ, there was no king, and that they could live however they want and they would not be held accountable. They gave one another degrees, awards, accolades and titles if they boldly proclaimed that there is no God. But lectures and bluster does not change reality. What will they do when they realize on that day, that everything that they believed and pursued is a lie? That which they refused to even consider is true and their worst fear is not only coming about, but it will now never end. But the coming of Christ is more than a day of judgment; it is a day of glorious reunion.

III. **The Coming of Christ will be marked by a glorious gathering of his own.** (31)

When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, he did so by a pillar of cloud by day. When God moved into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and then the Temple, his presence was marked by a cloud. The glory of God, described as the Shekinah glory cloud, marks the awesome presence of God. Ezekiel was given a vision of the glory cloud of God leaving the Temple because God did. But, then God came in the person of Jesus. The glory was hidden. Christ was veiled in human flesh. There were moments, like the event on the Mount of Transfiguration when his glory shone through for but a moment, but for the most part it was hidden. When Christ ascended into heaven, he ascended into the clouds and the angel said that he could come back like that. Christ is going to return

in the clouds of glory and while he will leverage his infinite power to defeat and judge his enemies, he will also leverage his infinite power to rescue and gather all his children.

The ultimate cosmic disturbance will be the direct intrusion of the Creator to take back that which belongs to him. For those who hate him, they will experience the worst day of their lives. For those loyal subjects who have known all along that this all belongs to him, it will be the most glorious day ever. Everything that they have hoped and believed and suffered for will be vindicated. They will see him whom they have believed. They will be with him whom they have loved. And in that moment, every act of faith, every belief, every hope, every sacrifice, every endurance, every obedience, every step and prayer of trust through the deep nights of the soul will be worth it and it will be worth it thousands and thousands of times over. What does this mean? It means this: If there is no God, then nothing you do matters. But because God has created this world and has actual ownership over everything and everyone it means that every single thing you do matters. Every single thing you do matters. Every single thing that you do, think and say will be accounted for. One way or the other, it will be accounted for. It will either be accounted for in Christ, or you will have to account for it. How can the return of Christ be your hope when you are a sinner?

How do you account for your sin? What excuse can you give to the King for your rebellion, your hatred, and your distrust? You cannot account for your sin in any way that will stand, if you try to account for your sin all by yourself. All by yourself you will have no excuses because you have no excuse for your rebellion. And if that were the end of the story, then none of us would have hope. But, remember when Jesus spoke these words. He was now a couple of days from going to the cross. He died because he took upon himself all of the sin of every single person who would ever believe in him. His death paid in full the payment of our sin. When you embrace that and trust in Christ, then what he did is applied to your life. The penalty for your sin is removed from your account and declared paid. The righteousness of Christ is applied to your account and you are declared righteous.

Think of it like this. Christ returns and sets up his hall of justice where every person is brought in to stand before him. On the massive screens the deeds, words and thoughts of the person are displayed. There are no excuses and no plea bargains because there is no defense. Assembled as the audience, in this massive courtroom are the men and women of faith along with your friends and church family. You wait in the wings of the stage while your secrets are revealed to your world. It is all there. In an instant every lie, every lust, every envy, every thought, every word of anger, every outburst of jealousy, every image viewed, is all displayed. You finally see and feel your sin for what it is. Your knees buckle, your guts heave, your chest is crushed with the weight of your guilt and you are frozen with fear. You are absolutely terrified. There is no excuse. And now, dazed and grieving you wait for your name to be called for you stand and admit the truth and the sentence that goes with it. And just before that happens, just before you walk out. You are stopped. A hand is on your shoulder. You look and it is Christ. And in your place he walks out and he owns all your sin. He says to his Father, "this one's on me. He's mine."

Do you see it now? I don't want you to turn from your sin just because if you don't you will lose everything. That is true. But I want you to turn from your sin and turn to Christ because you love Christ. You love Him. You believe Him. You believe and accept what He has done in your place. And now, you look for and long for and live for his coming because you love Him and can't wait to see him.