

FRIDAY: *What's the Point?*

Read: Matthew 24:46⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Matthew 25:10¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Matthew 25:30³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Reflect:

Since the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem (24:4-35) happened nearly 2,000 years ago, and Jesus' 2nd coming (Mt24:36ff) seems 'so far away' – what does all of this have to do with us? Basically, everything.

After Jesus completed His teaching about Jerusalem's destruction He constantly hammered the urgency for His followers to be ready for His 2nd coming (e.g., above verses; Mt24:42,44; etc.). Apparently these chapters speak directly to us. We need to be ready.

Jesus harshly rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23. Those rebukes culminated in a piercing question (Mt23:33). I don't want Jesus asking me that question! Perhaps Matthew 25:31-46 indicates how we can escape that sentence...

Respond:

Are you ready for Jesus' 2nd coming? What about your family, neighbors, friends...

Can you see how "eschatology" is vitally relevant to our lives today? Has your view of eschatology changed any this week?

If you knew Jesus was coming back in two weeks, how would that impact what you plan to do today? Since you'll never know when He's coming back, shouldn't you strive to live that way every day?

Pray: Pray for Brent as he continues to prepare for Sunday's sermon. Pray for someone you know who doesn't know Jesus. Pray for an open door to share the gospel with them (Col4:2-4).

SATURDAY: *Exclusivism or Inclusivism*

Read: Isaiah 49:6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Reflect:

I don't know if God could've been any clearer. **Genesis 12:1-3** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Did you catch that "all the families of the earth" part? Apparently many of the Jewish people had forgotten that part of the story...

God is concerned about the salvation of...everyone. While it was the Jewish people through whom He chose to work, His intention was never to exclude anyone. What do the implications of this have to say to the church today?

Respond:

Has a week of reflecting back on a sermon about the impact of eschatology on our daily lives (i.e., the need to be ready) impacted you in any way?

Have you ever written a list of people you know who need to know Jesus? If not, why not? Will you?

What can you do today to prepare yourself for worship tomorrow with the body of Christ at the building where NLCC gathers?

Pray: Thank God for another day of life; pray what you do today honors Him. Pray for God to be honored during our worship tomorrow; pray for our guests to be welcomed and loved; pray for lives to continue to be changed.

Eschatology: Irrelevant or Vital?

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If you look up "eschatology" in a standard dictionary you will read something similar to, "The department of theological science concerned with the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, hell."

In light of definitions similar to that, eschatology is a word that produces a variety of responses.

- Some do not have the slightest clue what it means or why it matters.
- Some "know what it means" and sadly ignore it, just like other parts of God's Word.
- Others "know what it means" and want nothing to do with it because it is perceived to be too confusing.
- Others "know what it means" and love talking about it because they want to know what is going to happen in the future.
- Still others "know what it means" and have their lives shaped by its implications.

Given this sampling of possible responses a natural question arises, "Why the disparity of responses to a single word?"

The word eschatology concisely means "the study of the last things." On one hand this includes any events happening at, or near (both before and after), the end of life as we know it (e.g., the second coming of Jesus and the final judgment). This seems to be as far as many people go with their understanding of eschatology.

- In light of this, it is easy to see why many people ignore it, thinking "it" is too far in the future to have any bearing on their daily life.
- This is also why some people relish talking about it, because they believe the Bible is trustworthy and anything God has put in it about the future must certainly come to pass.
- It is also why some people leave the topic of eschatology up to others, simply because the Bible is neither as detailed, nor as easy to understand, as we prefer and the "experts" are better at making sense of all that stuff anyhow.

While it may be shocking, the most important eschatological event ever was the first coming of Jesus. His first coming guarantees His second coming; it's only a matter of time. Furthermore, we are already living in the "last days" (e.g., Acts2:14ff; Heb1:2). Therefore, "Christian eschatology involves an expectation for the future which is rooted in what has already happened in the past" (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*. p20). The question of eschatology isn't "when" but "how" as in "how does this affect my life today?"

It is a sad commentary on much of Christianity when we would rather know and try to figure out "when" instead of living lives of constant readiness. A life lived in readiness is one that will bring glory to God.

MONDAY: Come again...

Read: Matthew 24:1-4 ¹ Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” ³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray.

<p>Reflect: Jesus had just finished insulting the Jewish religious establishment (23:1-36) because of their hypocrisy. Yet His compassion for them was still evident (23:37). It was certainly with a heavy heart that he foretold the destruction of the temple (23:38).</p> <p>Apparently the disciples aren’t quite sure they heard Jesus correctly because they point out the magnificence of the Temple mount (24:1, cf. Mk13:1; Lk21:5). Unimpressed Jesus says it will all be destroyed...</p> <p>There likely couldn’t have been more disheartening news for the disciples. The grammar of the statement in 24:3 indicates they are linking the destruction of the Temple with the end of life as they knew it. Were they missing something?</p>	<p>Respond: Does it ever trouble you that Jesus was extremely hard on the “religious people” of His day and friendly with practically everyone else? Does that concern you?</p> <p>We don’t grasp the significance of the Temple to the Jewish person. Imagine someone predicting the annihilation of the U.S. within 40 years. Ludicrous?</p> <p>Notice in v3 that Jesus is on a mountain (e.g., Mt5:1; 28:16) and He’s sitting (e.g., Mt13:1; 15:29). Evidently something significant is about to be made known.</p>
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Pray: Thank God for the blessing of worshiping Him with other believers yesterday. Pray that the Holy Spirit will prompt people to remember what they sang about and learned yesterday as the week progresses. Pray for God to raise up workers for His kingdom (Mt9:35-38).

TUESDAY: When?

Read: Matthew 24:4-14 ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray...⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars...⁷...and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places...⁹ “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death...¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

<p>Reflect: Wow, it certainly sounds as if things are going to get rough for <u>us</u>. Yet, who is the “you” in v4? To whom is Jesus speaking? Is He speaking to us nearly 2,000 years after these statements; or is to His disciples?</p> <p>While it is true that God’s word still speaks to us today; what it says <u>had</u> to have meaning for the original audience. Therefore the “you” in v4 (and throughout) are Jesus’ disciples. To apply this (or any) biblical text to us while dismissing what it meant to the original audience is erroneous.</p> <p>Furthermore, when haven’t there been wars (v6)? Reading Acts 11:27-30 shows one example of a famine (v7). There were at least 17 major earthquakes around Palestine during the early Christian era (v7). By the time the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, half of the disciples had been killed (v9)...</p>	<p>Respond: The word for “the whole earth” (v14) is practically always used for the “Roman world” (e.g., Lk2:1; Acts11:28). Apparently Paul thought v14 was fulfilled (e.g., Rom1:8; Col1:6,23).</p> <p>If you’re struggling to see any application of Matthew 24-25 to your life, hang in there, it’s coming...</p> <p>Did you notice v13? How does that relate to James chapter one?</p>
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Pray: Thank God for the truthfulness of His word. Pray for VBS – for lives to be reached and changed. Pray for God’s word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).

WEDNESDAY: Question #1 Wrap-up

Read: Matthew 24:32-35 ³² “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<p>Reflect: Think back to last year. Fruit trees were in bloom, but then freezing temperatures came and killed the buds; no fruit. It’s hard to tell when the cold weather is over. Yet a fig tree blooms later than virtually all other trees. When they bloom, summer is near.</p> <p>Who is “this generation” – is it us? Many like to say it is. Yet Matthew consistently uses “generation” to mean the contemporaries of Jesus (e.g., Mt11:16; 12:41,42,43; 16:14; 17:17; 23:36). Furthermore, “heaven and earth” (v35) was a Jewish way of referring to the Temple in Jerusalem.</p> <p>Up to this point in Matthew 24 Jesus has been talking about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. When His audience saw these signs they were to get out of Jerusalem. History indicates many did.</p>	<p>Reflect: Does it make sense that “this generation” means those alive when Jesus was physically on earth? If not, why?</p> <p>Isn’t it comforting to know that even though a physical structure may be destroyed (v35) Jesus’ words will last forever? In light of that, how guilty are we of putting too much emphasis on physical structures?</p> <p>Have these inserts (previous weeks included) been helpful for you? Please let me know tnerb7@yahoo.com</p>
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Pray: Pray for the Youth Group as they meet tonight. Pray for the unity of NLCC. Pray for strength to stay faithful in hard times (Lk21:34-36).

THURSDAY: Question #2 Addressed

Read: Matthew 24:36-44 ³⁶ “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah...⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming...⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

<p>Reflect: If you regularly read the NIV (which is fine) you’ll notice something different about v36. Jesus is now addressing a totally different subject. The disciples asked Him two questions (v3) which they equated as the same event. Jesus answers the two questions separately...because they are separate events.</p> <p>You’ve likely read the account of the flood during Noah’s day (Gen6-9). Who were the ones “swept away” (cf. Mt24:39) during the flood? Noah’s family (the righteous) were the ones “left behind.”</p> <p>Jesus didn’t know when He was coming back...how much more will we not know? You’ll notice that Jesus tells us we must be ready (v44) because His return will be unexpected. “When” is not the issue...our being ready for it is.</p>	<p>Respond: Can you see that Jesus has now shifted topics to His 2nd (and final) coming? Other texts with the same grammatical construction (e.g., Mt22:31; 27:46; 1Cor7:1,25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) clearly indicate a new topic is being addressed.</p> <p>Twice (vs42,43) Jesus tells His disciples to “stay awake” – which means be ready and alert. Do you live with an anticipation of Jesus’ coming?</p> <p>Being “ready” (v44) doesn’t mean sitting around waiting for Jesus to come back (cf. Tit3:1; 1Pet3:15). Does your life indicate a readiness for Him?</p>
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Pray: Pray for the Worship Team as they practice tonight. Pray for your desire to live a life of readiness for Jesus’ 2nd coming to grow. Pray for boldness to share God’s word (Acts4:29).